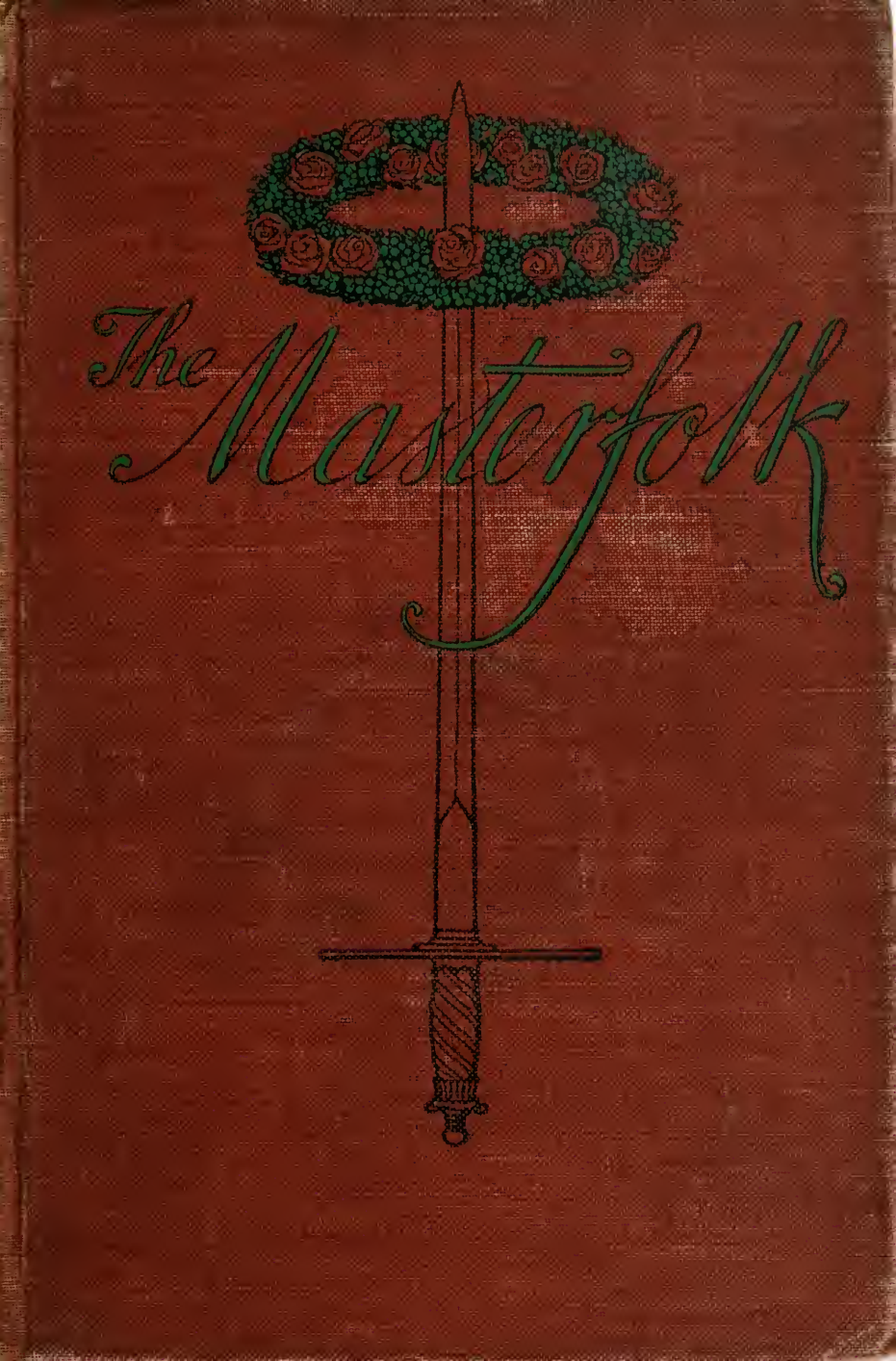
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THE MASTERFOLK

Wherein is attempted the unravelling of the Strange Affair of my Lord Wyntwarde of Cavil and Miss Betty Modeyne

by

HALDANE MACFALL
Author of 'The Wooings of Jezebel Pettyfer,' etc.

London
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1903

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TO

GEORGE MEREDITH

ESQUIRE

TO GIVE YOU THE SALUTE OF SOVEREIGNTY, SIR, CAN ADD NO TITTLE TO YOUR STATURE; BUT THERE IS SOLDIER'S DELIGHT IN SALUTING A CONQUEROR—AND TO YOUR BAYS THERE IS NO PRETENCE OF A PRETENDER

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OF THE BUDDING OF THE TREE OF LIFE

CHAPTER I

Which shows Some of the Gods in their Machinery, with but a Shadowy Hint of the Printer's Devil

AMIDST the untidy litter of torn paper that strewed the bare plank floor there stood a large double writing-table, spread with proofs and manuscript and pamphlets ; and, with his feet in the litter of the floor and his elbows in the litter of the table, sat a gaunt yellow-haired youth, solemnly writing.

Netherby Gomme peered at his work in the waning light of the departing November afternoon ; and the deepening dusk that took possession of the shabby room, turning all things to the colour of shadows, strained his attention, drawing long lines about his mouth and pronouncing the pallor of his serious face—the grim mask of the humorist. The slips of paper that were set into the sleeve-ends of his well-brushed threadbare coat to save the soiling of his shirt-cuffs, and the long reach of yellow sock that showed his feet thrust a wrinkled span beyond the original intention of his much-knee'd trousers, marked the ordered untidiness of the literary habit.

Everything in the room—the overflowed waste-paper basket at his feet ; the severe academic comfort of the polished wooden arm-chair that stood yawning augustly vacant opposite to him ; the shut door at his right hand, with its curt announcement of "Editor" in stiff, forbidding letters ; the low bookshelves about the room with their rows of books of reference, stacks of journals and literary scraps piled a-top of them ; the walls with their irregular array of calendars, advertisements, notices, and printed and pictured odds and ends ; the atmosphere of the scrap-gathering paste-pot and of clippings from the knowledge of the world ; the sepulchral, monotonous clock that ticked its aggressive statement of the passage of time as though with a cough of admonition that, whatever journalism might be, life was short and art was long ; the naked mantel beneath it, which held the shabby soul of the jerrybuilder turned to stone—for it is the hearth that is haunted by the spirit of the architect, and this one had been a vulgar fellow—the bare fireplace that did not even go through the feeble pretence of giving comfort, for it had no fender, no hearthrug, but gaped, bored and empty and black, upon the making of literature—everything marked the room to be one of those scanty workshops where opinions are made, the dingy editorial office of a struggling weekly review ;

and the extent of the dinginess showed it to be a very struggling affair indeed.

The young man blotted his writing, and flipped through some pages of manuscript :

"Oliver," said he, without looking up, "a light, I think! . . . We have here lying before us a most caustic literary criticism ; but the light is so far gone that we can scarce see the dogmatic gentleman's own literary infelicities—nay, can scarce see even his most split infinitives."

He spoke like a leading article, with a slight cockney accent.

In the gloom of a dark corner by the window, at a high desk that stood against the wall, where he sat perched on a tall office stool with his feet curled round its long legs, a small boy ceased reading, and, fumbling about in the breast-pocket of his short Eton jacket, lugged out a tin box, struck a match, and, leaning forward, set a flame to the gas-jet. The place leaped into light. The youngster flung the match-box across the room, and went on with his reading. It fell at the feet of the yellow-haired youth.

"Ah, Noll," said he, stooping over and searching for it amongst the torn fragments of paper, "like those of even greater genius, our aims are only too often lost in the sea of wasted endeavour."

He found the box ; lit the gas at his right hand ; coughed :

"Are you putting that down?" he asked drily of the grim unanswering silence.

The boy took no notice. The yellow-haired youth chuckled, and the deep-furrowed lines about his mouth broadened into a quizzical smile.

The boy Oliver could scarcely have been fourteen years of age, and had he not been son of the editor, and that editor the thriftless owner of but a very broken-winged Muse, and of a steadily diminishing literary property, the boy must still have been at school. He sighed heavily, rousing from his reading :

"I say, Netherby," said he, "here's a poem by that fellow with the hair."

He held out the manuscript.

Netherby Gomme looked up :

"A lyric?" he asked.

"No. Drivel.'

Netherby Gomme sighed, and sat back in his chair :

"With what candid brutality the sub-editorial mind treats the most ecstatic flights of the imagination!" said he.

The boy Oliver shifted impatiently on his high stool :

"Shall I reject the ponderous rot?" he asked.

Netherby Gomme coughed :

"*We*—if you please, Oliver—*we*. It is always better to adopt the editorial *we* in matters of weight ; and it throws the responsibility upon the irresponsible gods of journalism."

Noll sighed, stretched himself, and yawned.

"All right. We'll reject it, eh? . . . No good troubling the governor"—he jerked his thumb towards the editor's room—"he's so beastly short this afternoon. But I had better *write* the rejection, I suppose—the father doesn't like poets to be rejected on the printed form—they're so sensitive."

He settled himself to write a letter, tongue in cheek, head down, and quoting for the other's approval as he wrote :

" *The—editor—regrets—that—whilst—he—appreciates—the—beauty of—the—lines—herewith—returned—he—is—unable—to—make—use of—them—owing—to——*"

He came to a halt and invited the prompt. None coming, he glanced over his shoulder :

" What is it owing to, Netherby? I'm such a beastly poor liar. You've been on the press so much longer. Hustle your vivid imagination and chuck us an excuse."

Netherby Gomme shook his head :

" I am only a humorist, Oliver—humour must walk knee-deep in truth. I do not travel on Romance——"

" Oh, shut up ! . . . No good chucking the idiot roughly. . . . It's beastly long. . . . We'll chuck it for length, eh ?"

Netherby Gomme smiled at him :

" Noll," said he, " you are possessed of the magnificent carelessness of the gods—and I never interfere with religious bodies."

Noll turned to his writing again, and there was a steady scratching of pen on paper.

Netherby Gomme sat for awhile, his face seamed with comic lines of grim amusement :

" I suppose," he said at last—" I suppose we have read the poem, Oliver ?"

" No, *I* haven't. But *you* can."

Netherby Gomme moved uneasily in his seat :

" N-no. No thanks, Oliver. We'll take it as read.'

He coughed :

" By the way, Oliver, have you got the dummy for next week's issue over there ?"

Noll licked, sealed, and thumped the letter on the desk :

" Oh, ah, yes—I'm sitting on it and a bunch of keys to remind me." He took a bunch of keys from under him, and put them in his trousers pocket, then lugged out from beneath him the dummy form of the review in its brown-paper cover. He opened it, and wetting his finger on his lip, he flipped through the leaves with their proofs pasted in position for guidance to the printer.

" Look here, Netherby." He held up the booklet, pointing to a blank space. " The governor said I was to tell you we had better complete this column with a poem—says verse gives a pleasant appearance to the page." He dropped the dummy on the desk in front of him. " It's an awful bore, Netherby," said he, " but that bundle of poems he gave me the other day took up such a lot of space on my desk that I flung them into the waste-paper basket. Can't you knock up about twenty lines of amorous matter ? I promise not to whistle."

Netherby Gomme smiled grimly, sighed, took up a pen, and, drawing a sheet of paper to him, prepared to write. . . .

The yellow-haired youth had been with this literary venture from the start. He had begun as office-boy ; and as each member of the original staff had fallen out, at the stern prunings of necessity, he had

been promoted to their places, until he sat alone, as leader-writer, humorist, topical poet, sentimentalist, sub-editor, office lad, and general usefulness. Scrupulous to the smallest detail, reliable in the performance of the minutest fraction of his bond, he got through his work with the facility of a man of affairs; and, like all busy men, finding time for everything, he had spent his hours of leisure outside the office in the humane atmosphere of the theatre, in the tragic fellowship of the street, in the eternal fresh comedy of the city's by-ways, and in the company of the mighty masters of his tongue; in this, the best school of education in all the round world, he had acquired such a knowledge of letters, such a taste for the niceties of the written word, and such a mastery in its use, as would have astounded, as indeed it was destined to astound, even them that thought they knew him to his fullest powers.

The other, the editor's son, Oliver Baddlesmere, had come to the office to complete establishment straight out of the schoolroom some months back. He had been brought in to reduce the pressure of clerking work, and, owing to extreme youth and inexperience, had been given the simpler duties to perform, so that he came naturally and as a matter of course to preside over the destinies of the poet's corner and to impart information to a hungry world from the battered volumes of an encyclopædia, and suchlike heavy books of reference, the weight of which, in the intervals of airily relieving the world's thirst for knowledge, the boy used for the purpose of pressing prints—of which he was gathering a collection from the illustrated papers of the day, pasting them into brown paper scrap-books of his own making.

Netherby Gomme had scarcely got under fair way with the writing of his amorous matter when the boy whipped round on his office-stool.

"I say, Netherby," said he; "your book *is* making a splash all along the Thames. The bookstalls are covered with it—the whole blessed town is saffron with it."

The yellow-haired youth smiled complacently; sitting back in his chair, he nodded:

"Indeed?" he said.

Noll slipped down off the stool, took it up, and carried it over to the fireplace:

"You were a chunk-head not to put your name to it!" he said. "But all the same, you know, it's been roaring funny to hear the father and mother talk about it."

He vaulted to the top of the high stool, scrambled on to his feet, and, reaching up, opened the glass face of the clock:

"It almost bursts me sometimes that I can't tell 'em you wrote it," he said. He got on tiptoe and put forward the large hand twenty minutes, shut the face with a click, turned where he stood, and, thrusting his hands into his trouser-pockets, he added confidentially:

"D'you know, Netherby, between you and me and the office ink-pot, I never thought myself that you could be so uncommon funny."

The yellow-haired youth blushed.

Clambering down off the stool, Noll carried it back to his desk,

took down a tall silk hat, ran his coat-sleeve round it, and put it on his head.

Netherby Gomme coughed:

"Oliver," said he—hesitated—made a pause—then added nervously: "Oliver, I am going to confide in you. In fact, if I don't I shall get some sort of low malarial fever. Now, don't treat the confidence with the giggle of childishness."

Noll sighed. He turned, leaped on to his office-stool, swung round, set his feet on the bar, his elbows on his knees, his chin in his palms, and, peering at the other out of the shadow from under the brim of his hat, said gloomily:

"O lor! the little typewriter girl! . . . Why the dickens you don't kiss Julia and have done with it, Netherby, I can't make out. Hang it, *I* have! . . . It was very nice whilst it lasted, and all that, but there was nothing in it to write poetry about!"

Netherby Gomme flushed.

"Oliver," said he, with biting distinctness, "we have not yet shown the resentment that your vulgarity courts; but we would remind you that we may be goaded into flinging the office ink-pot——" He stretched out his long arm towards the large zinc well of ink before him.

Noll slid off the stool, putting it between them with the swift and calculated strategy of experience, guarding his head with his raised elbow:

"Chuck it, Netherby!" he bawled, dodging under cover of his desk warily; and he added in a hoarse aside, jerking his thumb towards the editor's door: "Chuck it! I withdraw."

The yellow-haired youth put down the heavy ink-pot.

Noll saw out of the corner of his alert eye that honour was satisfied, and as he ran his finger pensively down a large splash of ink that had dried on the wall beside his desk, he asked:

"Well? . . . About that confidence!"

Netherby Gomme cleared his throat:

"Now, Oliver, don't say anything about this to anyone. It might make me so ridiculous, and—professional humorists are keenly sensitive to ridicule——"

"Lor!" said Noll, leaving the patch on the wall. "Get on."

"This is in strict confidence, Noll."

"Oh, it's Julia all right enough," growled Noll.

Gomme went on, ignoring the comment:

"Noll, it is one of the penalties of fame that its victims must appear in the brilliant world of fashion." He coughed. "Come here, Noll." He unlocked and pulled open the drawer before him, and Noll, aroused to sudden interest, sidled over to him as he brought out from the drawer a very carefully folded dress-coat. "Oliver, I've got a dress-coat. You see, I may have to go into society at any moment, now that my book has caught the public eye."

Noll put out his hand:

"Let's look at the thing," said he eagerly.

Gomme caught his arm and kept him off it:

"Careful, Noll!" he gasped anxiously—"gently! or we shan't get it back into its folds."

He put it away carefully, locked it up, and, sitting back in his chair, he added gravely :

"Now, Noll, as one who has knowledge of the usages of polite society——"

"Eh ?" said Noll.

Gomme touched him on the shoulder nervously.

"No, no, Noll—I'm not accusing you of practising them. But as one born within the pale of good society—from no fault of your own, I admit—ought one to put scent on the coat ?"

Noll whistled :

"Je—hoshaphat !" said he, "I never noticed" He pushed his hat back on his head, thrust his hands deep into his breeches pockets, and fixed a searching eye on experience : "I'm not sure. N-no—I don't think so. The governor doesn't."

The yellow-haired youth shook his head solemnly :

"It's a most awkward point, Oliver—a most awkward point—and somewhat momentous. . . . One's first step at the threshold of a career should not be a stumble."

Noll's face lighted up with a suggestion :

"Tell you what I should do, Netherby. Just scent your handkerchief ; and if it kicks up a beastly lot of notice and makes you uncomfortable, you can always get rid of it——"

"Indeed, Oliver !"

"Rather. Hand it to a lady and ask her if it is hers. Gives you a sort of introduction, too."

Netherby Gomme stared aghast :

"B-but, Oliver, surely one is introduced in society !"

"Rather not—it ain't form."

"Why ?"

"Oh, I don't know ; it's the new hospitality. But about that scent, Netherby—let us try some on me, and I'll see if it worries the mother. The father 'll soon be nasty about it if it's bad form."

Gomme shook his head, and sighed heavily :

"Ah, Oliver, one has to be very careful in one's pose on entering a new world."

Noll nodded :

"Rather ! . . . Do you know, Netherby, it's a rummy thing how one begins to wash one's self and think about ornaments and things when one becomes a man, eh ?"

"A most rummy thing indeed, Noll."

Netherby Gomme sighed :

Noll looked at him with interest :

"It must be wonderful to feel famous," he said.

"It is," said Gomme gloomily. "Wonderful."

"But I don't see why you should be so beastly miserable about it, Netherby. It don't hurt, does it ?"

"Not exactly, Noll." The yellow-haired youth sighed. "I am only suffering from the mood of the time. . . . Pessimism is on the town. . . . A clerk with any claim to culture must affect Decadence this season—and it gives me the hump." He coughed. "Causes me acute mental discomfort."

Noll snorted

"Then I should chuck it," he said. "When I was a kid I used to worry if I were not the same as the other kids; but—hullo!" He looked up at the clock. "It seems to me it's about time to go and get tea."

He winked an eye solemnly at Gomme, and whistled his way airily out of the office. The door swung open, revealing a dingy stair-landing, shut with a bang, and swallowed him.

The sound of Noll's retreating footsteps on the stair had scarce faded away into the distant echoes of the street, when the door that led to the editor's room opened, and a well-groomed man of about thirty-five entered the office. Anthony Baddlesmere was a handsome, well-set-up fellow—indeed, it was as much from his father as from his mother that Noll inherited his good looks. He was handsome to the degree of beauty; and this it was, perhaps, which, in spite of the easy carriage of the body and the subtle air of good-breeding, gave the impression of some indecision of character in the man. Or it may have been that this indecision was increased by a certain embarrassment as he endeavoured to get a firm note into his voice:

"Oh, Gomme—have you completed the dummy yet—for this week's issue?"

Gomme got up from his chair and searched for the dummy amongst the papers on Noll's desk. But Anthony Baddlesmere had seated himself on the corner of the desk, and, fingering a paper-knife, he said:

"Oh—er—never mind. There's another matter, Netherby. . . . It's some years since I started this sorry venture in this office." He sighed, and passed his hand over his forehead wearily—"more years than I care to remember. You, the office-boy, were a lank lad of thirteen—I a young man, full of literary enthusiasms. . . . I tried to sell the public artistic wares"—he shrugged his shoulders—"tried to show them vital things—real things, instead of sham—tried to encourage promising youth"—he laughed sadly—"and a nice waste-paper basket we've made of it!"

He swung his foot and kicked the waste-paper basket into the middle of the room, sending its contents flying over the floor.

Netherby Gomme coughed:

"Yes, sir," said he, "a great deal of the promise of youth goes into the waste-paper basket."

Anthony Baddlesmere laughed uncomfortably; the laugh died out of his eyes, obliterated by a frown:

"Downstairs," he went on, as though repeating an unpleasant task he had set himself—"downstairs they have given the public trash—cheap. And I have lost. . . . In me the literary enthusiasm, a little chilled, perhaps, remains; but the youth has gone. As for you—you are office-boy still, to all purposes, and lank still—but, lord! how you have grown!"

Netherby Gomme looked down at his scanty trousers and sighed:

"Yes, sir, I *have* grown."

"H'm! like a scandal," said Baddlesmere; and a gleam of merri-

ment shot into his eyes, ran round the corners of his mouth, and vanished. "Gomme," said he, "we are at the end of our resources. This is our last week in these rooms. . . . The office is bare—my home is bare. All my money—all my wife's literary success—all have gone to feed the printing machine. It's great inky maw has swallowed everything. . . . However, there is no debt—except to you. But that is a heavy one. My conscience tells me that you ought not to have been allowed to remain here and share in the collapse; you ought to have been promoted—to have been sent to—to ——"

He hesitated—stopped.

"Where, sir?" asked the yellow-haired youth.

The bald fact was that Baddlesmere had never given the matter a thought until this disaster was upon him. He smiled sadly, and added vaguely:

"No place would have been good enough for you, Gomme. . . . You should have been promoted long ago. . . ." He roused and faced the position boldly: "But you have been such a good friend to me and to the boy—so useful a part of this office, that I am afraid I have treated you like a part of myself, and have come by habit to think the hat that covered my head covered yours. . . . Dame Fortune has knocked the hat off—and I find there were two heads inside it."

"Well, sir, we can look her in the face without the hat."

"Yes, yes, Gomme—but I have looked over your head."

"It has saved your eyes from the commonplace, sir, and my heart from a bad chill. I wouldn't have missed the past years in this office for a fortune."

"No, no, Gomme; nor I—nor I."

"They have made a man of me," the youth added hoarsely.

Baddlesmere put his hand on the other's shoulder:

"But you should have been promoted—you should have been promoted. . . . And I could so easily have sent you to a better billet." He sat down, and, fidgeting with the paper-knife again, he added, after a pause: "By the way, Gomme, I wish you did not write such a shocking bad hand." He smiled, half jesting, half serious. "Why don't you practise writing?"

Gomme's face became a dull, expressionless mask:

"I have, sir," he said grimly.

"How? You have!"

"I've written a book," he said.

Baddlesmere whistled:

"The devil you have! . . . Ah, Gomme, everybody writes books nowadays."

"But they read mine, sir," said Netherby Gomme. He dived his hand into the breast-pocket of his coat, and, taking out a bundle of press-cuttings, drew a much-thumbed one from the others. "Listen to the mighty Thrumsby Burrage in *The Discriminator*, sir." He read out the paragraph:

"*We have here a refined humorist, whose work is stamped with the hall-mark of genius.*"

Baddlesmere nodded; he was only half listening.

"Oh yes," said he—"*hall-mark of genius* is Thrumsby Burrage."

Gomme went on with a yawning travesty of the pulpit manner :

"*In the present day it is indeed a veritable intellectual treat to come upon the subtle workmanship of a man of large experience of life—workmanship marked by that delicate wit which grows only to perfection in the cloistered atmosphere of scholarship.*"

"Yes—*cloistered atmosphere* is Thrumsby Burrage."

Gomme's eyes twinkled :

"*We rejoice that a new man of genius has risen amongst us, and we do not hesitate to say that the anonymous writer of* 'The Tragedy of the Ridiculous' *is that man.*"

Anthony Baddlesmere shook off boredom, stood up slowly, stared at the gaunt yellow-haired youth before him in frank tribute of bewilderment, and said at last with hoarse surprise :

"*You* wrote this book, Gomme?"

"Yes, sir," said Netherby Gomme simply ; "but when I write my tragedy——"

Baddlesmere clapped a hand on his shoulder, and pleasure danced in his eyes.

"But, good God! you are famous, man—famous! . . . And you must be making a fortune."

"No, sir—I sold the thing for a few pounds."

Anthony Baddlesmere strode up and down the room.

"But, man," said he—"I have been trying all my life, and with every advantage, to create a work of art such as this ; and here are you, a mere stripling—damn it, scarcely out of knickerbockers—though, on my soul, you are nearly as old as your trousers—here are you, a mere stripling, famous!" He came to him, gripped him affectionately by the shoulder. "Of all men that I know, I would rather this thing had come to you than to any." He turned and got to striding up and down the room again. "Famous!—at least you will be as soon as you give out your own name."

Gomme's face had flushed a little with the praise :

"But," said he, "when I write my tragedy——"

Baddlesmere turned on him sharply :

"Tragedy be hanged!" said he. "My dear Gomme, you've got to recognise that the world never takes its humorists seriously. It's always looking for the joke in their tragedies. . . . Which reminds me, Gomme, I'm afraid to-morrow must see us out of this."

Gomme's face lost its mask :

"But, sir!" he faltered—fidgeting nervously with the papers by his hand—"what are *you* going to do? and Noll?—and Mrs. Baddlesmere—when the blinds are pulled down?"

Baddlesmere strode over to the window, and, gazing down into the dusk of the chilly street below, made no answer. He stood so for a long while, and wondered.

He wondered if he *had* given the public vital things!

His mind ran rapidly over the failure of his scheme—a scheme that, as he now saw, had been inherent with failure at its very inception. He saw now, as he stood there ruined by it, that it was folly to expect a public to buy literature built up on the mere brilliant literary exercises in technical skill of a smart group of young fellows who had

really had no claim upon the consideration of the world, nothing to say, no gift but a capacity to use the machinery of letters prettily; who had had positively nothing to offer to the world but old idioms freshly arrayed in pretty clothes—make-believe kings at a calico-ball. These had been but smart mediocrities—not an ounce of wisdom amongst them all. It came to him now with grim irony, as he stood there in confession to the clear-eyed judge of Self, that for all their cackle of literary style and their contempt for everyone else, these men had uttered no single thought worth preserving—that they had left their youth behind and were growing bald atop, and full-blown and ordinary—except——

Yes, the work of this Netherby Gomme. He knew now as he ran over the years, that all the best work had come from this youth's pen —about the only one of them all who had not given himself airs, who had put down the absolute truth as he whimsically saw it, who had worked and wrought amid bare walls and in hours snatched from toil-won leisure, whilst they all sat and prated of what they intended to do, and of how it should be done.

He turned from the window into the lighted office, and his glance fell on his son Noll's desk. It was the only artistic corner in the room —the prints, mounted on brown paper, which the boy had tacked to the wall, had a decorative effect that showed rare artistic taste in one so young.

A touch of pride came into the man's eyes, and went out in a frown. Netherby Gomme, watching him in alert silence, with delicate tact uttered no word.

As Baddlesmere moved towards the editor's room he asked abruptly:

"Where's Noll?"

"Heaven knows, sir," said Netherby Gomme airily.

The door closed on the editor, and Gomme heard the slam of the outer door, which told that Baddlesmere had begun to descend the stair.

"Heaven knows!" Gomme shook his head. "Playing with a sewer, most like. . . . But God is very good to boys."

CHAPTER II

Wherein it is discovered that, likely enough from an Ancestor who was Master of the Horse to King Harry the Eighth, Master Oliver had inherited some Gift of Horseplay, together with a Keen Eye for a Fine Leg on a Woman.

NETHERBY GOMME had been sitting some time writing at his desk when the door behind him was stealthily opened and Noll's head popped round its edge. There was a sharp click of a pea in a tin pea-shooter as the youngster let fly a careful aim at Gomme's poll.

Gomme jumped, and scratched the back of his neck irritably :

"Curse it, Noll!" he growled testily.

"Naughty!" said Noll, coming into the room, but giving the yellow-haired youth a wide circle as he moved to his desk, and keeping a wary eye on him under a magnificent pretence of carelessness. "Caught you on the raw that time, I think, my ink-stained warrior!" he added cheerfully ; but the fire was gone out of the old jest, and it was borne in on the youngster that the oft-repeated joke is somewhat of a damp squib. He broke the tin pea-shooter across his knee, and flung the two pieces into the empty grate. Strolling over to his desk, he took up the office-stool in his arms and carried it to the dusty fireplace. As he scrambled on to the stool Netherby Gomme watched him under his brows.

"I am relieved to see, Noll," he growled, "that you remember your manhood and your pose as a literary prophet, and intend in future to split hairs instead of spitting peas." He scratched his head irritably as the other, standing a-tiptoe on the stool, reached up and put back the minute-hand of the clock. "Confound it!" he added, as Noll shut the glass face with a snap, and came down gloomily off his stool—"the whole world seems to be suffering from the vice of forced humour in these days."

"Don't be waspish, Netherby," said the youngster.

He carried the stool back to his desk, took off his silk hat, hung it up, and solemnly mounted into his seat :

"I confess," he said, and he sighed, "I do feel beastly young at times."

"H'm!" grunted Netherby Gomme drily—"you weren't very long over your tea."

"No. . . . As a matter of fact, I haven't had any tea. I had to dodge

the governor, so I popped into the office below to call on your little typewriter girl."

Netherby Gomme moved peevishly in his chair:

"My dear Noll, for Heaven's sake don't call Julia my *typewriter girl!*" said he—"you'd think you were talking of a sewing-machine."

Noll raised his eyebrows.

"But—she is a bit of a sewing-machine—when she isn't typewriting. He suddenly disappeared over the side of the stool and took up a defensive attitude beyond his desk. "Chuck it!" he bawled—"shut up, Netherby! . . . Put that ink-pot down and I'll tell you the whole tragedy."

Noll climbed on to his stool again as the keen glitter went out of Gomme's eyes, and, sitting perched there with his back against the desk, he said calmly:

"Julia is missing!"

Gomme stared at him anxiously:

"Missing?"

Noll nodded:

"H'm—h'm!" said he. "They are getting rather fussy about it downstairs, and inclined to be nasty." He assumed an editorial manner and continued: "We regret to state that there has been marked uneasiness at Messrs. Rollit's typewriting offices owing to the fact that Miss Julia Wynne has not been heard of for the last hour; and this conduct, which might have passed unnoticed in any ordinary female clerk, has caused considerable anxiety in the office where she usually carries on her avocation, for, owing to the regular habits and exemplary conduct of the young person in question, the half-starved beauty of whose Burne-Jones-like profile——"

"We have not yet thrown the office ink-pot, Oliver!" said Netherby Gomme grimly.

Noll, guarding his head with his arm, peered out from beneath his elbow:

"No—but really, Netherby, it was beastly hard luck her being out. I like to go and gaze at her. She has such a jolly nice mouth. I should like to kiss it—it would do her a lot of good. . . . " He disappeared over the stool. "Shut up!" he shouted. "Put it down and I'll chuck it. I say, Netherby," he added confidentially, coming out into the open and disarming resentment by trusting Gomme's honour; "I saw a ripping girl to-day. She gave me quite a thrill."

Gomme sat back in his chair:

"Indeed, Noll!" said he, putting his fingers together, elbows on chair-arm—"this is most interesting. . . . What age was the lady?"

"Oh, quite twelve or thirteen. None of your Burne-Jones-like——"

He ducked his head under his arm and made for his desk backwards. He scrambled on to his stool as he saw that the other was not for war:

"No; she *was* a girl, that! Rich warm hair—reddish. Plumpish. Jolly way of walking. . . . " He paused for a moment and added critically: "She went off a bit in the legs—but—they mostly do at that age. . . . I offered her chocolates. . . . She sniffed."

"Not very encouraging, Oliver!"

"It *was* rather a blow," said Noll. "But I think a woman ought to be offish at first. I don't like 'em too easily captured myself."

"May I ask," said Gomme grimly, "if she be a lady of position?"

"Well—her antecedents are somewhat humble. Her father is a—well—he's a butcher. But every tragedy should have comic relief—shouldn't it, Netherby?"

Netherby Gomme shook his head solemnly where he sat:

"Noll, you are very, very old. Let us try to be young again."

"It's so beastly slow being young," grumbled Noll. "When I'm a man—Jeroos'lum! I *should* like to be a man—and shave!"

"And then you'll damn the razor. . . . Ah, Noll, it is with the razor that youth cuts its throat."

There was a long pause. The boy sat brooding on some perplexing problem; the yellow-haired youth watched him.

Noll broke the silence. He slipped down off his high seat, and came over to Gomme:

"I say, Netherby, your book *is* terrific though!"

"Thanks, Noll—you overwhelm me. . . . Ah, Noll, if all the world were as prejudiced an admirer as you are—and as frankly honest in the statement of their admiration—I might be a great man."

"But, Netherby," said Noll, eyeing him critically—"when did you discover you were clever?"

Gomme coughed:

"Well—er—when people began to tell me my own stories."

"I wish I could write that sort of comic rot," said Noll enviously.

"Noll, it is easy enough to be funny. *I* envy the man of action."

The yellow-haired youth got up from his chair, lank and lean and awkward, and paced the room with prowling gait.

"To feel the blood tingle through one in hair's-breadth escapes—to use one's strength—to live, man, live! . . . To be at grips with life and danger and death, instead of writing lyrics or other tomfoolery about it, or about what you think other people ought to think about it!"

"Chuck it, Netherby!"

Gomme, pacing up and down the room, took no heed of the interruption.

"Writing history across the face of the world! . . . That is a bigger thing than spilling ink. . . . I know what it feels like a little," he added. "The boxing sergeant knocked me down five times running in rapid succession at the gymnasium last night, and at the first fall I felt the transferred glory of what he must have felt. There is wondrous delight, a sense of the sublime, in conquest—even with the boxing-gloves on! . . . Of course, now, it would be something to write a *tragedy*."

Noll snorted:

"Oh, tragedy's all piffle! You don't go to a theatre to sniff. . . . Give me a jolly good pantomime for an artistic jaunt. Shush! the governor."

He vaulted on to his desk-stool as the door was flung open.

"Cafoshulam—it's Julia!" he cried, swinging round on his stool again as the door shut with a slam, and a pretty young woman in neat black dress ran up to Netherby Gomme.

"Oh, Netherby," she gasped, seizing his arm, "there's a horror of a

man keeps following me about—from the time I was at the coffee-shop—and I've been afraid to go back to the office lest he should follow me there. And so, at last, I've run up here. What am I to do? The man frightens me out of my wits."

"Hush, Julia—keep calm."

Gomme stroked her hand, and, leading her quickly to the editor's room, threw open the door:

"Quick, Julia—in here!"

Julia grasped his arm as he was about to shut the door upon her:

"No personal violence, please, Netherby. You won't hurt him—will you?"

"My dear Julia," said he, hurrying her into the room, "I am surprised at such a suggestion!" He shut the door, and, turning his back upon it, he added grimly: "Personal violence is quite contrary to the traditions of this office, Noll—it should, in our judgment, be the very last resource." He coughed. "The office broom, I fear, Noll, is in the editor's cupboard——"

Noll whooped:

"Hooroosh!" cried he—"we haven't had a row in the office for nearly five weeks!"

There was a loud knock.

Noll whipped round on his high stool, and was immediately engrossed in the heavy work of his office.

"Come in!" cried Netherby Gomme.

The door on to the landing was thrown open and revealed the figure of an elaborately dressed exquisite, who entered the room deliberately, diffusing scents—one of those well-polished, shining beings who never seem to catch a speck of dust. He had an hereditary qualification to pass for a gentleman—he knew how to dress for the part. He could strain good taste in adornment to the uttermost stretch without breaking it. He stood with the arrogant self-assurance that largely stands for good-breeding amongst the inane, and though the perfection of his clothes' fit could not hide the fact that the lamp of intelligence burnt but gutteringly at the top where were his wits, he had the self-respect to ignore his defects. He looked calmly round the room, and, taking a card with deliberate coolness from a silver cardcase, he asked:

"Will someone—ah—kindly give my card to—ah—that most comely young lady who—ah—has just come in?"

Gomme walked over to him and took the card, which the exquisite held out to him between the first and second fingers of his lavender-gloved hand.

"Will no one offer me a chair?" the affected voice asked plaintively.

Gomme motioned him to a seat by the empty fireplace, and the other strolled thither and sat down on the edge of it with deliberate care. The seat was gone—a bristling hollow only left. He took off his hat and looked about the room with a cold, critical stare.

Gomme took the card to Noll.

"Mr. Ponsonby Wattles Ffolliott," he read in a gruff whisper, handing the card to the youngster; and he added grimly: "Destiny was against the Thing from the beginning, Oliver. A man like that

was bound to go on all fours and eat grass." He raised his voice: "The editor's room, please," he said. And, as Noll scrambled down leisurely from his seat, the yellow-haired youth added under his breath solemnly: "Oliver, select the best office-broom, and as I cast him down the stairs, kindly crack the hero's shins. It will confuse his retreat. War is an art—not a vulgar scrimmage."

Noll solemnly carried the card into the editor's office. Gomme went to his seat, sat down, and aggressively paid no heed to the Thing.

The exquisite became nettled. Said he affectedly:

"That's an awfully smart office-girl of yours——"

Netherby Gomme rose slowly from his chair, and, walking over to him, stood and looked down at him with contempt.

"Oh, you're a judge!" said he—"a sort of overdressed Paris awarding the apple——"

"Oh, no," protested the exquisite Ponsonby Wattles Ffolliott; "you are quite mistaken. I have never been in Paris, and I'm not at all keen about apples."

Gomme laughed loud. Ponsonby Wattles Ffolliott fidgeted uneasily.

"Are you the editor?" he asked.

Gomme smiled.

"No," he said—and added drily: "Luckily for you."

"Why luck-i-ly?"

Gomme coughed.

"The editor kicks like a horse."

Ffolliott sniggered uneasily:

"Really!" he drawled. It was faintly borne in upon him that he was neither shining nor making an impression. His eyes ranged aimlessly round the room, and he added fatuously:

"So this is the sort of place where you literary fellows hang out!"

Gomme stared at him in grim silence.

The exquisite Ponsonby shifted in his seat:

"None of my people have ever been literary," he drawled; "they all belonged to the virile professions. . . . At least, I *suppose* that's the office-girl. . . . However, as I said before, I'm not a literary man myself——"

Gomme's eyes glowed threateningly, but the resplendent fool seated before him was too heavy-witted a dullard to hear anything but the cackle of his own voice, or to be alert to anything but the sordid desire of his own eyes.

Gomme laughed drily.

"Man? . . . You're not a man!" said he.

Ponsonby Wattles Ffolliott was genuinely shocked:

"Really, you know——"

He stopped. He saw that this yellow-haired, gaunt other man, a loose-limbed, powerful fellow, was glaring at him in anything but friendly fashion, and he was dumb.

Gomme's level voice went calmly on:

"Tsh!" said he, "you're a perambulating monkey, scented and got up and flung upon the town by Providence to remind us all from what

we came—and to what we may return—if we forget that we were meant to grow into God's good image."

"You—you're a common fellow!" said Ponsonby Wattles Ffolliott.

Gomme's keen eyes remained fixed on him with a steady contempt, that ate even into this dunce's conceit. He went on, giving judgment on the travesty of manhood that sat before him:

"You silly fool! It's disgusting that a pretty woman can't walk down the high streets of the most civilized city in the world without the risk of some painted peacock of an 'Arry like yourself——"

"'Arry, indeed!" bleated the exquisite. Ponsonby Wattles Ffolliott was wounded in his most religious parts. "I have the blood of the Plantagenets in my veins," he said.

He was very indignant. He spoke with simple faith, as if of the certainty of a glorious resurrection.

Gomme turned, and called out:

"Open the door, Oliver!"

The door swung open, and discovered Noll at the head of the stairway, gripping a long broom in his hands.

"Oliver," said Netherby, and his eyes shone, "this is, I think, positively the first occasion on which we have flung a genuine Plantagenet down the office-stairs. It is indeed an emotional moment. . . . I am thrilled."

He made a grab at the throat of Ponsonby Wattles Ffolliott, who evaded it with an upward fling of the elbow as he scrambled in a ladylike way to his patent-leather feet, and put himself into an affected attitude of defence, his silk hat in one hand and his cane in the other.

"Wh—what are you—do—ing?" he asked plaintively.

Netherby Gomme laughed, eyeing him as might a hungry dog a bone.

"Ay, Noll; take careful aim," said he, as the exquisite began to back towards the door. "What a destiny, to bark the shins of the royal house of Anjou!"

Noll could be seen at the head of the stairway, beyond the open door, weighing the broom to get the balance and the grip, and swinging it with careful aim at the place where he calculated would come the shins of the exquisite Ponsonby.

Netherby Gomme pounced upon the retreating body of Ponsonby Wattles Ffolliott, and this time he got his fingers inside the exquisite's collar.

"Go—away!" gasped Ponsonby Wattles Ffolliott.

There was a sharp struggle as Gomme, gripping him by the throat, forced him backwards to the open doorway, nearly jerking the complaining head off the narrow shoulders, until the room swam round dazedly in the revolving addled wits of the miserable man.

"I say," he gasped—his plaintive voice in pained remonstrance as they swung round the doorpost—"this is—horribly—sudden!" He groaned.

In his frenzy his gloved hand made a grab at the handle of the door, which shut upon them with a loud slam.

Julia opened the office-door stealthily, and put forth an anxious head.

She could hear the scuffle outside. She ran into the room in a state of nervous trepidation :

" How dreadful !" she said ; ran back into the office ; shut herself in.

A yell of victory from Noll told that the office broom had got home amongst the shins of the Plantagenets.

Julia opened the door a little way again and peeped nervously into the office.

She saw the door from the stairway fling open, and Comme stroll in, adjusting his coat and smoothing down his hair with his hands ; and through the open door there came the sound of fugitive anxious feet going nervously before pursuit, rushing frantically down the stairs, leaping and stumbling. Noll, with the broom poised in his hand, was leaning over the balustrade, his legs and back exquisitely thrilled, and as he flung the broom he burst into a cheer, his aim carrying away the silk hat of the fugitive exquisite below.

" Ripping !" cried Noll, and dived down the stairs after the hat.

Gomme halted, and listened.

The distant sound of feet, rapidly descending the stairs, told of the recuperative force and staying power of the Plantagenets even in defeat.

There was a loud crash of glass.

Julia started and wrung her hands.

A bland smile came over the face of Netherby Gomme :

" We have repeatedly pointed out to the landlord," said he, " that the large glass door at the foot of the stairs is a source of considerable danger to any person proceeding down the staircase at an accelerated pace."

Julia came out from behind the door, and ran to Gomme :

" Netherby," said she, " it made a horrible noise." She wrung her hands, grasped his arm. " I hope to goodness you haven't dashed that stupid man's brains out."

Netherby put his hand on her shoulder gently :

" It cannot be done, Julia," said he. " No jury would convict on so weak a charge."

The tears sprang into Julia's eyes :

" I hate to see men quarrel," said she petulantly ; " they always push each other about instead of reasoning."

Gomme laughed loud and long :

" Ah, Julia," said he, tenderly taking her hand in his ; " there are some things beyond reason. Take ourselves. The reasons why a certain little woman finds reasons for not being reasonable—oh, bother !"

The door shut with a loud slam, and Noll came into the room, trailing the office broom after him.

" I say, Julia," he said ; " it's very soothing and nice, but there's some one coming."

He shot the broom into a corner, and vaulted on to his high stool, as Julia put herself as far from Netherby as the office would allow.

Footsteps came to the door.

CHAPTER III

Wherein Master Oliver comes to the Conclusion that, to complete the Dramatic Picture, Greatness should have known the Hair-Shirt and the Makeshifts of Adversity.

THE door swung open, and a handsome woman of about thirty walked into the dingy room. She was possessed of that calm and the fresh easy manner and movement that come of generations of women who have exacted respect from their fellows—and given it.

Netherby Gomme went to meet her, and as she shut the door she held out her gloved hand to him:

"How are you, Mrs. Baddlesmere?" said he.

"How are you, Netherby?" It was a charming voice that spoke. "Julia, too! why this thusness?"

Julia blushed and smiled embarrassedly:

Mrs. Baddlesmere turned to the boy:

"Hard at work, Noll?"

Noll shrugged his shoulders, where he sat hunched on his office-stool:

"No, mother, I miss my tobacco," said he.

Mrs. Baddlesmere laughed lightly.

"Don't be stupid, Noll. Remember, you promised me—for a fortnight, you ridiculous child."

Noll smiled dryly:

"Mother still thinks I am in knickerbockers," said he. "She wanted me to wear a sailor hat last summer with ribbons hanging down behind and *H.M.S. Sardine* on it in gold letters. Women have the strangest ideas about men's clothes—even the married ones."

Caroline Baddlesmere went to the boy and put her arm through his.

"What an inky state you get into, my dear Noll!" she said.

"Literature is not to be made without the spilling of much ink," said Noll.

Caroline Baddlesmere sighed sadly.

"Well, Noll, after to-day you need not trouble with the spilling of ink," she said.

"Why, mother?"

Mrs. Baddlesmere turned to Gomme:

"I suppose, Netherby, you know that our days at the old office are over—that we have failed to make the ends of this paper meet!"

"Mr. Baddlesmere has told me," he said simply. It struck him painfully, in spite of the calm of the delicate woman who stood before him, that she too had been told the worst not very long: "I am afraid," he added, "it is a very anxious time for you, Mrs. Baddlesmere."

"Yes, Netherby; but we must be packing what few things we want to keep." Cheerily drawing off her gloves, she added with sudden seriousness: "I had not realized the position until Anthony told me a day or two ago, but within twenty-four hours I had settled everything —even the debts. And we have just taken a top-floor within half-an-hour of Charing Cross. It's very airy—and it's a large room—and the landlady's a dear soul." A twinkle came into her eyes. "But I'm afraid we must give up our weekly receptions." Her shoulders gave the slightest suspicion of a shrug, and a serious catch came into her voice: "I'm only distressed to think, Netherby, that your loyal friendship to us has brought you no richer reward than a share in our disaster ——"

There was a heavy step on the landing without. Caroline Baddlesmere dashed a handkerchief across her eyes, and, opening the editor's door, she signed to Julia to slip away with her.

There was a loud knock.

A big, gloomy man entered, flung the door to again dramatically, and strode solemnly into the room. His lank iron-grey hair, the massive pale clean-shaven face, the seedy frock-coat tightly buttoned across his body, his close-fitting much-knee'd trousers, and deliberate calculated stride, all gave him the air of a decayed actor of the old school; and his large gesture and full dramatic voice, that gave value to every word he spoke, heightened the impression; whilst the loose black cloak that was flung back from his shoulders finished it.

"I am Eustace Lovegood," he said tragically, and brought his cane down upon the floor.

"Yes, sir," said Gomme.

"Thanks, young man," said he; "I require your confirmation of the pathetic fact. I dined out last night"—he touched his forehead with his forefinger wearily—"and my most unprofitable intellect reminds me of what my bank-book and the neglect of the world have long since ceased to remind me—that my name is Eustace and Lovegood. . . . I must see the Editor."

"Yes, sir." Gomme waved him to the chair by the fireplace. "Be seated, sir."

Lovegood looked at the forbidding chair, then glowered at him.

"No," said he, "I will *not* be seated."

As Gomme rose, and, hiding a smile behind a cough, moved towards the editor's office, the tragic eyes of Eustace Lovegood turned to the boy Noll, where he sat, still as a statue, on his office-stool:

"Ah, Oliver!" said the big man; and a smile shot into his eyes. "How is the boy Oliver?" He was moving towards Noll when the office-door opened, and Caroline, followed by the others, entered the room.

"Hah, Caroline—a pleasant surprise indeed!"

He took off his hat with the grand air, and swept her a low bow. He strode to her, and, raising her hand to his lips, kissed her white fingers.

"What! you too, Miss Julia? I am your servant."

They all smiled affectionately—he was obviously an old friend.

As his voice ceased there was a brisk step on the landing outside—a sharp knock—and the door flew open. A little man with a big moustache entered fussily, on jerky restless feet, and glanced sharply round the room; he was best known as a minor critic—one of those men who condemn everything they do not understand:

"How do, Mrs. Baddlesmere?" he said, with a harsh voice and nervous manner.

His eyes glanced away to Julia, to whom he nodded:

"How do, Miss Julia?"

His glance jumped to Noll where he sat observant, chin in palms, on the high office-chair:

"How do, Master Noll?"

The boy nodded:

"You've forgotten your hat, Fosse," said he.

The fussy little man snapped off his hat:

"So I have—so I have!" he yapped.

Eustace Lovegood took three heavy paces towards Gomme, and said, with a black frown, in a confidental aside:

"Faugh! that dreadful fussy little man of rude health—and the scarlet voice!"

Mr. Fosse turned at the grumbled bass:

"How do, Lovegood?" said he.

"Thanks," said Lovegood solemnly—"I don't."

And he added in growled aside to Netherby Gomme:

"I wish this person would not be familiar with my health."

Mr. Fosse skipped nervously towards Caroline Baddlesmere:

"Eh—eh! Well, Mrs. Baddlesmere; and how's the book?"

Caroline Baddlesmere's shoulders gave the slightest possible shrug:

"My book is dead, Mr. Fosse."

Fosse folded his arms:

"Precisely," said he. "Honestly, it lacked the vital element of style." He blew out his narrow little chest—he had the floor. "You have tragedy—pathos—and—er, yes—comedy. Yes, you have a certain amount of humour—a marvellous amount, indeed, for a woman, if you will excuse my saying so. Yet, comedy but raises a laugh"—he shrugged his little shoulders—"and there you are! . . . Tragedy but appeals to the emotions—draws a tear"—he shrugged his little shoulders again—"and there you are! . . . But Style is independent of laughter or tears. Tragedy——"

"Pish!" pshawed Eustace Lovegood. He stepped a pace into the room: "Tragedy!" he roared scornfully, glaring at the fussy minor critic before him; and even the light of the conceited little Egoism seemed to flicker out, blown aside by the big man's contempt: "Tragedy is the mere melodrama of life—the shedding of blood but the indecent accident of death. . . . It is comedy, the expression of the joy of living, that is worthy the serious attention of genius." He

rose on his toes and made an elephantine gesture of sending off butterflies into the air. "The exquisite little *mot*—the fairy fabric of a dainty paradox—the swift epigram! Think of it—the rapture of the exquisite agony that is in the elaborate workmanship to create the spontaneous repartee!"

Mr. Fosse was not quite sure whether he was being chaffed. He was one of those men so wanting in humour that he accused the humorous of lacking humour. He knew that his thin voice sank to insignificance in the deep thunder of this big man.

"Er—yes. N'yes," he said—and glanced uneasily at the others. Gomme's face was a stolid impenetrable mask.

Fosse skipped over to Gomme, and seizing him by the coat-lapel he said nervously:

"Oh—ah—Mr. Gomme——"

Eustace Lovegood snorted and strolled away to where Caroline stood.

Fosse blinked uncomfortably at Gomme.

"Ah—as a matter of fact—I came on business," said he. His harsh jerky voice dropped into confidential whisper. "Might I beg of you to put in a little paragraph about my coming novel?"

Gomme nodded.

The little critic coughed:

"If—you could hint—just *hint* that it is somewhat daringly original! I don't even mind if you hint that it is rather—sinful—with—er—just a little suggestion that I am the English Maupassant, eh! . . . I can assure you," he added, touching Gomme's arm, "I can *assure* you that Thrumsby Burrage of *The Discriminator* said so at dinner last night."

Netherby Gomme coughed:

"I did not know that Thrumsby Burrage drank," said he.

"Does he? Indeed! Very sad!" The fussy little man's foxy eyes turned inwards, searching through his quick weasel intelligence to discover the connection, but failed: "Very sad indeed! Genius is nearly always wanting in the moral attributes. . . . But to return—if you would suggest that my work contains that—er—that—er——"

Netherby Gomme nodded:

"That combination of religion and immorality which is so alluring to the British public in a work of art," said he—"yes, I *quite* understand."

Fosse roused from his self-concentration ·

"N'yes," said he—"but perhaps if I——"

"Certainly, Mr. Fosse; I was about to suggest that you should write it yourself; and we'll whip it into shape——"

"Delighted, my dear fellow, delighted!" The fussy little man's fussy little feet began to shuffle with eagerness; he skipped towards Gomme's desk.

Gomme put himself in his way:

"If you would send it by post, please, Mr. Fosse! Good-evening!"

Fosse came to a halt:

"Oh—a moment!"

He took a pinch of Gomme's coat-sleeve:

"Y'know the whole town's as hot over this new humorist, the fellow that wrote *The Tragedy of the Ridiculous*, as they were over Mrs.

Baddlesmere a few years ago; but, y'know, they're overdoing it—they're overdoing it. There's bound to be reaction. So I've just written a scalding little thing about it."

Gomme's eyes twinkled:

"But——"

Fosse tugged impatiently at his sleeve:

"Y'know, it doesn't do to go with the crowd. Art is only for the elect. The popular verdict *must* be vulgar——"

Noll, watching from his high perch on the office-stool, raised his voice:

"Now, that's curious, Fosse," said he—"for he was here only this morning—and *he* was talking about *you*."

Fosse was intensely interested:

"Indeed!" said he—"how very interesting! May I ask what he said?"

"Well, you know, it was a private conversation—I don't quite exactly like to say——"

"It will go no farther—go no farther," persisted Fosse, on the tiptoe of eagerness.

"Well, he said you ought to chuck literature and try window-cleaning——"

Lovegood's deep chuckle echoed about the room, and Caroline Baddlesmere reprovingly said:

"Noll!"

The little man's face became scarlet; then went white. He raised himself on his little high heels as far as his full rigidity of back and limb and pride would take him, and, tilting his nose in the air:

"Puppy!" he snorted, and walked angrily out of the office.

Julia went and scolded Noll, who hugged her.

Lovegood turned to Caroline Baddlesmere, and the laughter went out of his eyes:

"Caroline," said he, "I have heard rumours of the disaster impending here—Anthony told me only this morning."

"Yes, Eustace. I've gone quite out of the fashion—just like yourself. But we must not whimper when the days are black."

"It grieves me," said the big man sadly. . . . "You are not a good subject for the boiled potato—the homely bun."

"Nonsense, Eustace; we were all happy enough in the old Paris days—before I made my mark with the book."

Eustace Lovegood's eyes turned into the past. "Ah, the Paris days!" said he, and fell into reverie. . . . "That reminds me," he added after awhile. "Last night, as I supped under the stars at an itinerant barrow, regaling myself on a wondrous baked potato, a wandering musician splitting the air with peevish song in the murk of the London night, like some lost soul from the damned—most dramatic situation—a note of tragedy in the blackness of the world——" His mind wandered off into his thoughts, and he stood for awhile gazing into the night that was gone, forgetful of all that stood about him.

"Well, Eustace!"

The big man's consciousness came back to his body with a start

and he took up his tale again: "A little woman in seedy clothes, a tattered shadow, flitted out of the other shadows of the lamp-lit night, and touched me on the arm. She wanted money. . . . It was the husk—the dusty shabby husk—of little Kate Ormsby, whose singing had some vogue a few years ago——"

"Kate Ormsby?—who was engaged to poor drunken Andrew Blotte?" she asked hoarsely.

"Ah, but remember, Caroline, he did not drink when he was engaged to Kate Ormsby. Blotte was the most brilliant in promise of us all. . . . All *that* began when Paul Pangbutt took her away from him——"

"But—why didn't you send her to me?"

Caroline suddenly flushed embarrassedly, and added with a dry laugh:

"Ah—I forgot."

She traced her confusion with her fingers on the palm of her slender hand.

Lovegood went on dreamily:

"Since Paul Pangbutt threw her over in Paris, like one of his discarded painting-rags, she has steadily gone down hill. . . . She wanted to know if I had seen Paul since he returned from his tour of the European courts and had set up his big studio in Kensington." He shrugged his huge shoulders. "But I told her that the great did not much care about associating with me—that most of those that once knew my Christian name have forgotten even my surname."

Caroline nodded:

"Kate Ormsby never had imagination," said she—"she does not realize how greatness crowds out the memory."

Lovegood smiled sadly:

"She sings for money at tavern doors now," he said—"and she was such a dainty creature!"

"Yes—I suppose you gave her your last half-crown, Eustace!"

The big man put out a deprecating hand:

"You exaggerate, Caroline; I lent her a florin——"

She nodded:

"And so there was no lunch to-day—and will be no dinner!"

"Pray do not exaggerate, Caroline. I wish you would not exaggerate. . . . I shall not regale at a restaurant—that is all. . . . Look at the potentiality of satisfaction in the homely bun! . . . As a matter of fact, I think the moderns eat too much flesh——"

"Tut!" said Caroline Baddlesmere—"don't make excuses to your own conscience. . . . But you want to say something, Eustace—I know by the way you are fiddling with other subjects. Do say it like a good fellow."

Lovegood coughed:

"Yes—the fact is—I—have—in my room—an old chippendale writing-table. It belonged to an eighteenth-century ancestor who wrote the most execrable verse. You remember the modest piece of furniture?"

A twinkle shot into Caroline's eyes:

"Well, since you press the question, Eustace, there *is* a piece of furniture in your room."

"It is grown somewhat shabby," he resumed—"and a friend of mine who has long had a great fancy for it——"

"Yes," said Caroline slyly—"what was your friend's name, did you say?"

"Oh—ah—yes—his name is Gordon."

Caroline nodded:

"Yes," said she—"I suspected it was your uncle, Eustace—his Christian name is, I think, Isaac."

The big man chuckled:

"Do you know, now I come to think of it, his Christian name *is* Isaac," he said. . . . "He has long had a fancy for it. I called in just now as I passed, and told him he might have it. . . . It will give me more room——"

"Oh, yes—it *will* give you more room," said Caroline dryly. "Go on, Eustace."

"Yes," said he—"I detest to feel cramped. And I thought—as an old friend—I might be permitted to suggest that—as you might want a little loose cash on changing houses——"

Caroline Baddlesmere stamped her foot:

"I am exceedingly angry with you, Eustace. You had no right to sell an heirloom," she said furiously. "Your room is a positive disgrace of emptiness as it is." She made an effort to keep her voice steady. . . . "It is quite bare and homeless enough to make me miserable every time I think of it."

Lovegood touched her arm:

"Well, it's done now," he said pathetically—"and unless you take the money I don't quite see how I am to proceed in the matter—without thwarting my original intention——" he added fatuously.

"I shall go and have the whole bargain cancelled," she said.

"Hush! Caroline; I don't think it would be quite a proper place for a gentlewoman to be seen in—upon my word——"

"Who is the pawnbroker?" she asked bluntly.

Lovegood coughed:

"Caroline, I do not think I deserve this unkindness. He is a collector of second-hand oddities. As a matter of fact, I only lent it."

Caroline tried to keep back the tears:

"You are a ridiculous good fellow," she said; "but you do exasperate me. . . . What on earth are you going to write upon?"

Lovegood looked relieved:

"I wrote for an hour in bed this morning," he said. "It was an intellectual treat. I shall always compose the finer flights of my imagination in bed in future."

Caroline laughed, with a sob in the laugh, and stroked the big fellow's sleeve affectionately:

"No, Eustace—I cannot accept it, old friend." She dashed the handkerchief to her eyes, and added airily: "Well, well—it's really very serious—I shall have to wear shabby gowns again. Hush!"

She signed for silence.

They all listened.

There was a shuffling footstep on the landing, and a ridiculous and

quavering attempt at a drinking song. The door was flung open and a man, giddy with strong liquors, lurched into the room.

He came to an unsteady standstill, blinked at them all, and solemnly took off his hat.

"My God!" muttered Caroline Baddlesmere — "it's Andrew Blotte!"

"Here's poor Mr. Andrew Blotte," said Julia in a frightened whisper to Noll.

"Hullo, Mr. Blotte!" cried Noll from his high perch—"we've just been talking about you."

The drunken man sniggered:

"Talk of a nightmare—and you hear it hiccup!" said he.

But the effort at merriment upset his balance, and he made at a rolling gait for the desk, gripped at it to steady himself, and turning himself very carefully so as to avoid confusing his feet, he sat himself down against the edge of it.

His face became a bland smile.

His was a splendid head. From the square brow the strong hair sprang like a lion's mane, and the fine massive head was set on the shoulders in a way that gave a sense of forcefulness in the man. But the once-handsome features were now heavy with drink, their beautiful form was being scarred deep with harsh lines, and the hint of beauty was only a haunting shadow of the thing that had once been. His chin and jowls were sprinkled with a grizzled growth of beard a couple of days old.

He waved his hand round the room, and brought it with a strong masterful grip upon the desk on which he leaned.

"Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen," he said, somewhat shamefacedly—"I had only looked for Anthony Baddlesmere—to find out his new address—but the fact is——" He looked slowly round the room, and his eyes lighted up as he recognised Caroline: "Ah, Caroline!—just the person I would have wished to see. You'll excuse me maintaining a firm position—here—but the fact is—I'm far from sober."

"Ah, Andrew!" she said, coming to his side.

"Yes, Caroline—I've been watching the almonds bloom—I have been walking on air—in realms where there is no solid, base, nor tangible reality. Tush! And you would call me—not sober! . . . Most—ridiculous—prejudice! . . . Why should people of taste be sober, when by tasting what tastes well they may walk on air? Such a strange convention! . . . Consider the position: You stroll down the filthy Strand in muddied boots, all the shabby world hurrying by, thinking sordidly of money and greynesses—or crawling along with hunger in their eyes under the miserable gas-lamps. . . . Sip the nectar of the gods, commune with Bacchus, and you are in a street of the world of dreams—you are a-riot—you walk on the wind—the trees are all in bloom—faces are laughing at you—the very cast-iron lamps come to greet you—the air is full of music—you sing—everyone sings! . . . Tush! you are a god."

"Ah, Andrew—when vice becomes a virtue, virtue seems but a feeble vice."

Andrew Blotte laughed :

"It's your trick, Caroline," he said airily ; and added, in a thick-voiced confidential aside, glancing round the room with drunken caution :

"It's rather a confidential matter, Caroline—but—we seem to be amongst friends. So I suppose it's all right. We're amongst intimates, eh ? Good ! All right."

He whistled a refrain gallingly out of tune.

"Andrew !—Andrew——!" She put her white hand on his arm.

Andrew Blotte patted the slender fingers :

"Now don't go wasting shame on me, Caroline. The fact is—nobody ever expects me to be in anything but a shameful condition. Think what a disappointment I must be when I am sober ! What more embarrassing to a sober community than the return of the prodigal son ?" . . . He laughed sadly, then seriousness came back to him. "But what I want to say is this : I hear you want money. . . . Well, I can lend you a loan. . . . I can't get it to-day because —well, you see, it's rather a ridiculous position—the fact is, I'm not quite aggressively sober—and my landlady has strict orders not to give me any money unless I am able to count a handful of small change without leaning for support on a physical basis. . . . Rather acute, I think—isn't it ? . . . But I'll make a note of it for to-morrow. I'll tie a knot on my handkerchief—hic——" (He fumbled for his handkerchief with drunken awkwardness.) "No !—*you* tie a knot on my handkerchief."

He held it out, and she took it to humour the poor fellow.

"Andrew," she said, "do go and rest awhile in Anthony's room. There's a comfortable armchair for you."

"No," he said peevishly, "I don't want to rest. I'm always resting. Andrew Blotte is tired of Andrew Blotte. . . ." His mood suddenly changed ; a light came into his eyes : "Yes," said he, "I will promise to rest—if you'll promise to take my loan."

Caroline shook her head.

Lovegood went over to him :

"Come, Blotte," said he.

Andrew Blotte shook his head :

"No," said he, "I mustn't rest. . . . I've promised to take a poem before gaslight to the editor of that new literary review—forget his name, but his address is on one of my cuffs—somewhere. . . ." He chuckled, as at some reminiscence : "He said he wanted a sonnet of two or three pages or so, but I told him it couldn't be done—even Will Shakespeare couldn't do it. . . . But he wasn't to be put off." He dug Lovegood in his tightly buttoned ribs : "He said I *might choose my own subject!* . . . But I told him—hic—he must mean a madr'gal. . . . We became quite friendly. For an illiterate person he was almost poetical. He confessed he had known love. Even editors have not always been bald. But—it is time to come and see the almonds bloom."

He took Lovegood's arm and made for the door. As they strode out together he turned and kissed his fingers to them all.

Caroline followed them to the head of the stairs to see them depart.

Julia slipped anxiously across the room to Netherby Gomme:

"Netherby, what is this? Is it all really true?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me, Netherby?" The tears sprang into her eyes.

"I guessed what I guessed, Julia; but I have only known to-day."

"Where are they going to live?"

Netherby Gomme smiled sadly:

"Well—Mrs. Baddlesmere has taken what is called by the house-agents the *spacious, well-lit, and airy upper floor of an imposing family mansion in the West End. . . . We* should call it an attic in Hammersmith."

Noll, who had slid down from his office-stool, crept up to Julia:

"I say, Julia," said he, "things seem a bit sour, don't they? . . . I suppose you and Netherby will be wanting to get married, too, and all that sort of tomfoolery—and I had hoped to have coloured a meerschaum pipe for him as a wedding-present. I did begin one, but it made me so jolly sick. I have started a sailor on it now. Awfully ripping chap! Said he didn't mind doing it for half-a-crown if I supplied the 'baccy. He's a terrific clever fellow—he can spit fifteen feet! I measured it. . . . I was very lucky to get him"—he sighed heavily—"but I don't see how the deuce I shall pay him for the job now."

Julia put her hand on Noll's shoulder:

"You are such a sadly vulgar boy at times, Noll," she said. She dabbed her eyes with her handkerchief.

"What are you sniffing about, Julia?" he asked, knitting his brows. "The mother has taken a jolly nice top-floor, *I* can tell you. One of the rooms is whopping big. We are going to do our own cooking—on such a rummy little stove. It'll be a tremendous lark, won't it? Roof slopes like a hen-roost. . . . I once poached an egg in the lid of a biscuit-tin over two candles—Jeroosalem! it *did* take a time—but it *was* an egg—it never quite got out of the wollopy condition, I don't know why—and it burst half-way through the business—I think I kept jogging it up too often with a pencil to see if it were stiffening. But it was the most eggy egg I ever tasted."

Julia laughed lightly to smother a sob:

"You are a ridiculous boy, Noll," she said.

Noll held her out at arms' length and looked at her keenly:

"What *are* you sniffing about, Julia? Anyone been annoying you?"

Caroline had stolen back to the room. She walked over to Julia and put her hand on her shoulder:

"It's all right, Julia," she said gently—"no one will be any the worse for it. It's always darkest before the dawn.'

"Of course," said the boy Noll, straddling his legs and peering at the coming years—"every great man begins in an attic."

CHAPTER IV

Wherein it would appear that the most respectable Stucco Architecture may be but a Screen for Gnawing Secrets

THE boy Noll shut the door that gave on to the narrow landing from the two large attics which were now his home, pushed back the silk hat on his head, and thrusting his hands into his breeches pockets, and whistling an air, he glanced up at the skylight above him to see whether the weather held.

He tramped slowly down a few steps of the top flight of carpetless stairs that proclaim the attic heights, and halted aimlessly.

It was more than vaguely borne in upon him that a great change had come over his life since, a month ago, he had taken down his prints from the walls of his empty home, and, with them tucked in a bundle under his arm, had walked into the twilight, trudging it on foot after the cart that contained the few pieces of furniture and such belongings as had not been sold, and, at the solemn journey's end, skipping up three or four whitened steps, had entered the doors of this stucco well-to-do house that was let in apartments, standing, one of a row of like houses, glued together along the length of a long winding street—a "street with a good address," the advertisement had it.

The cushioned and unthinking ease of childhood was gone, buried in that empty house he had left behind him—the door was shut on that for ever. The rougher, hardier period of boyhood was upon him.

It now came to the boy, who had never even wondered where everything came from, that each such everything had always had to be won by the sweat of toil. He had wondered more than once why that for which he had asked had sometimes been refused. But he now realized that the lucky-bag from which childhood gets all it wants was empty—sold at a tap of the hammer with the other things in that dead house, by an auctioneer fellow—gone—vanished.

He tramped down some half-dozen bare board steps that resounded to his boots, and halted again.

He was beginning to see that the fuel of life was not to be had for the asking. His mother sitting the livelong day and far into the night in that big attic he had just left—the one with his little bed in the corner of it, the large room that served as general sitting-room by day, his bed with coloured covering becoming in the daylight a couch

therein—his mother sitting there writing, with absent eyes fixed on her distant purpose, brought into hard reality the harder fact that money had to be earned—that it did not come from Somewhere for the beckoning. His father's long absences, and his boots muddied with long trudges, were significant and unspoken about, hinting of mysteries he could not wholly fathom—nor was the serious gaze of the handsome face as his father sat at night and stared at the stove less troubling to the boy.

He tramped down another step or two.

It bothered him that he could not help. He knew he must grow into youth before his hand could win this wage that all the world was hurrying after.

He tramped down a few more steps.

For one thing he felt glad. He had thought it a bore when his mother had made out a scheme of reading for him, making him give his morning and a couple of hours of the afternoon to a course of English literature and history, and a promise to keep up his mathematics ; but, as a matter of fact, and to his intense surprise, he was enjoying it.

He tramped down a couple of steps.

It was so like the mother to have clung to her books when she sold even her silks and satins !

He tramped down another step.

He wondered why there was no carpet to the attic flight. He wondered who lived in the rooms on each of these four landings below. That Major Modeyne, who lived on this one below them, seemed such a pleasant old fellow—it was a great pity he came in so late and so often the worse for liquor. . . . But he was mighty funny over it. He wondered if he felt as funny as he looked. It seemed such an odd thing to fill one's self with strong liquors until one glugged hiccuping and ran over !

He tramped down several steps.

The boy had always thought of himself as being a part of a vague body of people called gentlefolk—a people who were always provided for from some gentlemanly source of livelihood which demanded clean hands and a sense of duty and no manual labour or a shop, quite a species apart from the mere middle-class world, and for whom the working classes provided the comforts of life, cleaning their boots and doing them service. Tradesmen and the labouring class, of course, were bound to earn a livelihood—a thing which he had always felt, without being expressly told so, to be rather a vulgar thing to do ; although, of course, it was a very good thing for that sort of people.

As he reached the bottom of the uncarpeted stair, and was about to step on to the drugget of the landing, a door opened, and there came out on to the landing a child of about twelve.

She shook back the nut-brown hair from her clear grey eyes and gazed defiantly at Noll :

"You're a fool !" she said.

Noll took off his hat, sat down on the bottom step, put his chin in his hands, and gazed at her :

"You're very pretty," he said.

"I didn't say you were an impudent fool," she said hotly—"I meant a common, vulgar tomfool."

Noll nodded.

The dainty slender girl before him gazed at him sternly:

"It was you that put all the water-cans about the landing, and the water-jugs on the stairs, for my father to fall amongst when"—she hesitated and flushed angrily—"when he came back late last night."

Noll nodded:

"Yes," said he—"and he fell amongst them." He chuckled. "I watched him over the rail. It was moonlight up here. He came crawling up the stairs in the dark, saying Shush! to himself if a board creaked, and carrying his boots in his hand so as not to wake the landlady—and when he got on to this landing he gave a monstrous hiccup that jolly nearly pulled him off his feet, and he tripped up amongst the cans—away went his boots, and fell in the hall below. D'you know, I shall never play a lark on your father again—he's such a gentleman. Most people would have sworn themselves putrid, but he just rubbed his shins and elbows, sat up in the moonlight, and said with a hiccup: '*What a prodigious number of stars there are at the north pole! Shakespeare has cracked every nut—when beggars die, says he, there are no comets seen, the heavens themselves blaze forth the fall of the landed gentry. . . . I did not know all heaven held so many, various, multitudinous, and vast prodigious stars!*'"

The girl waited grimly until he had done:

"It was you who made a booby-trap in his bed so that he could not get into it?"

Noll nodded:

"Yes," said he; "he looked jolly comic under the bed; he got under—he must have slept there."

"That's just where you are mistaken," said the child with a sneer. "I never go to bed until my father is asleep. I got him out. . . . I suppose you thought you were funny!"

Noll nodded:

"Yes," he said; "I did, last night. But I don't now. I think I was a cad."

"So do I," she said. . . .

Noll sat for awhile and gazed at her.

He got up and held out his hand sheepishly:

"Shake hands," said he; "I apologize. It's my birthday to-day."

Betty considered.

She hesitated—then put out a delicate thin hand:

"What age are you?" she asked.

"Fourteen," said Noll.

"I shall be twelve to-morrow," she said.

"Then let's keep it now," said Noll. "I'm going to see a splendid fellow, a friend of mine—he's a prodigious clever fellow—he's written a book."

The child's eyes glittered :

"Has he ?" she asked.

"Yes, rather. Come and see him too."

"All right," she said ; "but come in and have tea first, and I'll put on my hat and jacket. We shan't be very late out, shall we ?"

"I'll bring you back the moment you like," said Noll. "We only have high tea in the evenings now, so my people don't mind my being late to an hour or so ; they know I'm with Netherby. But we'll be back sharp, and you can come to tea with us, eh ? I'd like to introduce you to my mother."

The child nodded, and led the way into the Major's quarters.

Noll, with the boy's quick vision, took in a first picture of the little lady's surroundings that never left him.

It was a large and airy room, furnished within the absolute limits of necessity. In a corner by a door stood the child's little white bed, but it required more imagination than was given to the ordinary to call up the image of a small child that stood every night listening at that other door to hear whether her father's breathing were heavy enough for sleep ; to call up the vision of the slight figure that nightly opened that same door with stealthy care to make sure of the candle being out, and all danger of fire set far from the reach of awkward drunken hands ; it demanded a keener ear than his to hear the last sigh of the child as she slipped into her bed in the small hours of the night and lay down to take her long-delayed rest in that sleep that should have sealed her eyes for hours, and had already held the rest of the world for a half of the night.

The dainty little figure that now stood before the mirror, giving to her hat just that touch which makes or mars the adornment of women, showed no peevish rebellion against, nor carping discontent with, the sordid burden of life that had been thrust upon her far too young and sadly thin little shoulders. She might indeed have gone, as she stood, to Court, and withal taught the ladies of fashion there assembled more than something of the queenly attitude.

The atmosphere of the child it was that took the sense of emptiness from the empty room. The little table that stood before the fireplace, with a napkin spread upon it for table-cloth—it had been washed by her small hands—and the coarse tea-things set out upon it: these things and the kettle that bubbled on the hob had quite evidently been deserted by the child when she marched out to her attack in the passage.

Noll now proceeded to make the tea at her bidding—she giving him orders as she gazed into the mirror, in which she commanded a view of the room.

The lad's eyes wandered over the walls, which were bare enough to bring his quick attention to rest on the picture of a man in uniform that hung over the mantel—the picture of handsome Cornelius Mauduit Modeyne as he had been when he married the mild beauty with the tragic eyes that dreamed out of the picture hanging pendant to his, and to whom the child bore more than a little likeness. Had the

pictures been inspired with the history of these lives, they would have revealed the early death of the brooding beauty in the birth of the small child whose hands were now the only hands that tended these two miniatures with the caressing touch of affection—the man's picture would have continued the confidence, and told of handsome Corney Modeyne's seeking relief from loneliness in the mad lees of the bottle —it would have whispered, too, of the meeting of his old comrades in his room to tell him he must slip quietly out of his old regiment—of his retirement with a step of rank—of the two years of his living upon his relations until they grew first weary, then exasperated, then hostile towards him, and the always rather silent child that flushed at all their harsh thrusts at her easy-going father—and of his final collapse as that mysterious personage who is an urgent daily "something in the city." It would have revealed what was hidden even from the buzzing gossips of the Street with the Good Address—that Major Cornelius Mauduit Modeyne, when he sallied out at the breakfast hour with a swaggering air, in well-groomed attire, polished boots, and shining hat, as soon as he could be got out of bed by the silent child who guarded all his secrets that could be hid, owed his good care to those self-same small hands. As it would also have revealed that, in spite of all shame, the dainty hands that did these things and had these cares, touched everything that had to do with this foolish sinning man with a fierce affection.

Indeed, there is more in noble tradition than in blood. The battle-cry of the ancient Modeynes had been Loyalty.

Modeyne came of old aristocratic Catholic stock, but he had long ceased to attend his church ; and the image, a very beautiful image of the Mary and Child, that stood upon his mantel was the sole relic of his old beliefs—even it did not stand there from any vague sentiment towards his church ; indeed, it had not gone to the pawnbroker as much from negligence as from religious bias.

The child would sing to herself at times the beautiful lines of the *Ave Maria* that Gounod has set to Bach's Fugue, just as she would lilt a nursery rhyme ; but the learning of it was an early reminiscence of her father in his cups, moved to song. Her prayers, on going to bed at night, were just a part of her duty in putting off her clothes — it warmed and coloured the child's imagination, was the full stop to her day, but it was quite aloof from the conduct of the world. From Modeyne the child had inherited remarkable charm of manner as well as much of her dainty delicacy. . . .

The hat and jacket being arranged to her taste, the child went and sat down beside Noll, and presided over the hospitalities. She apologized for the thickness of the bread and butter, but she said it was her last meal of the day, and she was always hungry for it. She remembered she had some cake, and tripped off to the cupboard ; but her face fell when she took the fragment out of its carefully enwrapping silver-paper.

"I got it nearly a month ago—for my father's birthday," she said simply. "I'm afraid it's gone dry."

"I like it all rubbly best," said Noll—"it tastes so nutty." He deceived the child into a smile. In any case he was in the caterpillar stage of youth.

They ate it between them.

"It *is* rather nutty," she said. "I never noticed that before."

Childhood takes the world for granted.

As the two went cheerily down the stairs and out into the street, the boy's heart lightened ; the gnawing sense of loneliness that had oppressed him fell from him, and the stucco street turned to a way of palaces in the grey of the twilight.

CHAPTER V

Wherein Miss Betty Modeyne is introduced to the Study of Nature

As they stood on the doorstep, waiting for the answer to their ring at Netherby Gomme's bell, Betty broke a pensive silence:

"I have never spoken to an author," she said.

She had not imagined the spring of literature as running in so dingy a well.

Noll pshawed airily:

"I've known a lot," said he. "They're just like everybody else, except when they think they are not—and then they are beastly tedious."

The door was opened by the grim old lady who was mother to Netherby Gomme. Her, Noll saluted cheerily. The old lady shook hands with him and darted a jealous look at the girl.

Noll explained:

"I have brought a friend of mine," said he—"Miss Betty Modeyne."

The old lady bowed stiffly to the child.

Noll took off his hat:

"I suppose Netherby is in?" he said, calmly walking into the passage; and the child followed him.

The old lady shut the outer door:

"Yes," she said—"he's about finished work by this, I think."

"Don't you trouble to come up, Mrs. Gomme," said Noll airily, opening the sitting-room door with elaborate formality for the old lady; "I know the way up, don't I?"

She smiled. The light suddenly snapped out of her shrewd eyes again—she glanced sharply at the girl:

"I suppose," said she, "the little lady will remain with me?"

Noll laughed:

"Oh no; she wants to see a great writer in his workshop," he said; and the jealousy went out of the old lady's eyes. She nodded and smiled as she withdrew to her chair by the fire.

The youngsters made a move for the heights.

Noll, when he had shut the old lady's door, said to Betty in a whisper:

"That's her bedroom at the back."

They mounted the stairs.

"She lets the other floors," added Noll, as they passed shut doors. "Netherby's room is right at the top. . . ."

Netherby Gomme made his visitors welcome. The talk was soon rattling at a pace.

He suddenly missed from her place the dainty little figure, and, looking up, he found that she was making a round of the attic, his beloved workshop. The child had slipped off to peer at the prints which hung tacked on to the walls on squares of stiff brown paper—the overflow from Noll's collection. They added a delightful touch of beauty to the dingy place, and were in splendid sombre harmony with the books, themselves amongst the most decorative of all ornaments—which here held possession of every nook and cranny, and overflowed every shelf.

Netherby Gomme went and lit a candle, holding it for her that she might see the better.

"What does that say to you?" he asked the solemn child. She was gazing intently at Timothy Cole's exquisite wood engraving of Millet's "Sower."

"It says—no, it *sings* to me," she said, trying with deliberate searching to find the absolute word, as a young thrush tries its notes; and the effort of her intellect to express the right hair's-breadth value touched Gomme's instincts and made the art leap within him. He nodded. The child faced the picture, and went on haltingly:

"It sings to me of—— It is a man walking in a furrow—and all the earth seems to be whispering—in a sort of hush—as if live things were coming out of the silence. Twilight is far more full of spirits than any other time—things that beckon and tell secrets. The dusk is always filled with whispers, as if sweet young things were being born, and poor dying things were glad to be going to sleep. . . . That's the sower—he walks along and sows. And he is solemn, because he knows that all that he flings on the dark earth will spring in the dusk, and become alive."

Netherby stroked her head:

"Betty," said he, "do you think the artist who painted that picture meant you to feel all that?"

"Didn't he?" she asked simply. She looked at it again with serious grey eyes. She shook her head doggedly. "No; that isn't just a man in a field. Sometimes pictures look as if they had been painted just because the painter wanted to show how cleverly he could draw an eye or an ear or a bootlace; but, look! this sower has not got any of these things, yet somehow they are there—they seem to come in as one looks. The sowing in the twilight is the thing. I can hear the big clumsy man walking with long strides, his heavy footfall all muffled in the brown earth. I can see it and hear it and smell it——"

The child ceased speaking, at a loss to explain, her little brows knit as she stood searching for expression.

The boy Noll stood at gaze, wondering.

Netherby Gomme said not a word.

The girl sighed:

"Doesn't it say that to you?" she asked, looking up at the big awkward fellow, whose intent face, lit by the candle-light, showed large eyes fixed on some distant thought.

He came back to earth :

"Yes, Betty," said he—"something like that. That is one of the world's masterpieces."

"Masterpiece." The child repeated the word lovingly—"I like that word—masterpiece."

She went to the next print. It was the wondrous little wood-engraving of the vision as seen by the youthful Holman Hunt of The Lady of Shalott when the mirror cracks from side to side and the web on the loom flies wide, for her eyes have seen unheeding Lancelot.

The child looked at it for a long while :

"I think I know what that means," she said—"the lady has been weaving something, and it has all got tangled about her, and she can't undo the knots."

She sighed :

"It is so hard to undo the knots," she said.

Netherby Gomme coughed :

"Have you ever heard the ballad of *The Lady of Shalott*, Betty?" he asked.

The child shook her dainty head.

"Sit down in a cosy chair and I'll read it to you," he said. And he set his armchair for her, seating himself by his lamp.

He took up a battered, dog-eared volume of Tennyson and read the immortal ballad, and Betty, to the haunting music of the verse, strayed into the meads by Camelot, and, lingering by the river's brink, she listened with the awed reapers amongst the bearded barley, watching the heavy barges glide by until there came wending past that most tragic barge of all that floated down to the hushed death-song of the broken-hearted faery Lady of Shalott.

Netherby Gomme closed the book gently, and watched the child.

Her eyes were full of tears :

"But—but why did she die?" she asked eagerly.

"She loved what could not give her love," he said.

The child nodded her head :

"I think I understand," she said.

The child sat silent for a long while. Then she took the lighted candle and went and peered at the little design. She came back to the table, and put down the candle upon it :

"I like the way that lady's head is placed right up against the top of the picture," she said—"as if she felt something were crushing her down. . . ." She put her small hands on her dainty head—"crushing and crushing her down—and she can't get away from it, because—it's all tangled—tangled—tangled. And it won't come right. . . . It always feels just like that."

"Good God!" said Netherby Gomme hoarsely—"has this child begun to suffer already?"

The child went to his knee and gazed at him :

"Your eyes are full of tears," she said.

He blew his nose noisily :

"You must not take my tears too seriously, Betty," said he—"I am a humorist."

"But Mr.——"

"No, no, Betty — no misters, please, between us here — plain Netherby," he corrected her.

"But, Netherby," she said simply, "I thought everyone had known suffering."

"No, thank God," said he.

"Only women?" she asked.

"No—it isn't a matter of man or woman. Only God's aristocracy are crucified," he said. "Only a few suffer so."

She looked into the beyond; a smile ran round the serious little lips:

"I *am* glad to hear that," she said.

And she added after a while:

"I shall sleep better now."

Netherby turned in his chair and looked at the child solemnly:

"Come here, little woman," he said.

She came to him, with her light walk, a dainty lank child, wrought of the finest fibre.

He held out his two hands, and she put a slender little hand in each.

"Betty," he asked, "who have you heard say these things?"

"No one," she said simply—"I just feel them so."

Netherby stroked her head:

"One of these days, Betty, the world will listen to you. But don't trouble about things until you are grown up—just enjoy your life now. Noll, Betty is too much indoors. She must get out into the fresh air of the world—she must study nature—we must take her to the theatre."

Betty's eyes sparkled:

"I've never been to a theatre," she said, her nerves dancing.

"Then we'll go to a pit to-morrow night, Noll, eh? all three of us."

When Betty and Noll with Netherby descended the stairs, the door of the old lady's sitting-room was open.

Betty turned and walked in—stepped lightly to the side of the old woman where she sat before the fire in her armchair, her old watchful eyes fixed on the open door, and the child leaned forward and kissed her withered old cheek:

"I love you," she said, "because you love Netherby; and you have his big kind eyes."

The old lady put out her old hand and stroked the child's head:

"But you are leaving Master Noll sadly out in the cold, my little lady," she said.

Betty turned and looked at Noll:

"Oh no," said she—"I love him in quite a different way."

The old lady laughed.

The next morning being Betty's birthday, she found at her door a sheet of stiff brown paper on which was fixed the print of "The Sower," the whole set in a battered old picture-frame of Noll's. It was the first birthday gift she had ever had—as long as she could remember. . . .

The evening of her twelfth birthday Betty spent in the pit of a theatre.

The sound of the rushing feet of the theatre-goers passing eagerly into the pit in holiday humour ; the rustle of silk and satin and the leisurely entrance of handsomely dressed women into the more gorgeous comfort of the stalls as they dawdled to their elaborate seats ; the delicious tunings of violins as the bandsmen took their places in the orchestra ; the burst of music ; the echo of the stage carpenter's hammer from the screened world hidden by the great curtain beyond the footlights ; the lowering of lights and resulting sudden darkness in the theatre ; the sharp clink of a bell for the ringing up of the curtain ; the hushing into silence of the whispering audience ; the slow uprolling of the great curtain as it was gathered into the flies ; and the footlights disclosed another world, flinging its large picture upon the vision—the fantastic reality of the drama—a world that comes to life for a little while and holds the imagination as it were held by a dream.

So the child sat, between Noll and Netherby, holding a hand of each. It struck her keen wits as strange that in the large drawing-rooms of her fashionable relations she had felt no warmth of affection towards the glittering women who turned their cold critical eyes upon this child of their ne'er-do-weel soldier kinsman—yet here were two lads, whom she had not known a couple of days ago, winning her confidence by their large chivalry, their whole-souled friendship now grown as old as her life—friendship such as makes of life a splendid adventure.

When the curtain came down on the last act, the child sighed. She realized with a pang that the play was over.

CHAPTER VI

Wherein it is hinted that to be Famous is not necessarily to be Great

In a large and richly furnished studio that was the splendid workshop of a fashionable portrait-painter there stood before an easel a handsome fair-bearded man—handsome, though the head was small—a fellow who held himself with self-reliance, straight and satisfied. And with the calculated stroke of one who has mastered the technique of his craft, he set down the loaded brush on the embrowned canvas, yielding a touch of colour that told like living flesh on the portrait of the pretty woman whose likeness he was building up into life.

The stroke of colour pleased him, and he stood back and peered at it. He turned his head and glanced keenly at the pretty woman where she sat in the handsome chair that stood on the painter's throne before him, her beauty enhanced and brought out by the carefully arranged crimson draping that was set in the grand manner as a heavy curtain looped behind her with golden cords and tassel—indeed, she made a telling picture as she sat there framed in by the great screen that was placed at her left hand to keep away the draught from the large double doors near by.

The beauty of Lady Persimmon, as the world knows, had caught roving royal eyes ; and she was at the height of her vogue, gathering from this strange source of public esteem such homage as is given to the toy of a court. She was, in very truth, exquisite as a butterfly.

"Ah," said she with languid, lazy accent that caressed the words she uttered, "I should love to live in Bohemia." And she added with a pout : "Society is such a weary round—and so spiteful !"

Paul Pangbutt shrugged his shoulders :

"A part of the price you must pay for being a beautiful woman, my dear lady," he said—and he went back to his painting.

"What? Spite !" she asked, the handsome brows meeting in questioning furrows. Her lips were very red—*half open with delicious whisperings of scarlet sin*, a minor poet had it—so she would keep them half open, though she most pronouncedly estranged herself from the minor poet for close upon a fortnight in display of her deep resentment. Thus, too, she was now being limned.

Pangbutt painted the corner of her pathetic mouth :

"Spite is the unwitting tribute of a petty mind," he pronounced.

"I don't see that that is any excuse for it," she said smartly.

Pangbutt stood back ; and he uttered a light laugh :

"The world is one vast engine of criticism," he said. "A man is not a critic because he writes for a newspaper. That act is generally the mark of his incapacity. We are all discriminators. Bless my soul—*conversation* is criticism more than half the time! And why not?"

"That's rather alarming, isn't it?" she cooed. "Fancy if we criticised our friends!"

"Exactly what you do!" he pshawed. "You give your friendship: it is criticism in action. On others you turn a cold shoulder. You have said no word—but you have passed criticism. You have—well! —you have turned a very pretty but cruel back—uttered a more brutal verdict than tongue ever spoke."

She laughed lightly:

"You're a charming colourist, Paul—but all your craft cannot whitewash spite," she said.

"No, no," said he. "I only say that criticism has its shabby side. Spite is criticism gone sour. . . . But, tsha! I don't believe there is all this venom in the world." He laid down his palette: "It's a very comfortable old world. . . . I'm afraid the light has gone."

He pushed the easel aside, and came to where she sat. He set a foot on the throne, and leaned his elbow upon his knee, gazing into her eyes:

"The light has gone, and your great beauty calls for all the light—it dares the sun's severest cross-examination."

He held out his hand and she placed her slender fingers in his; she felt his admiring regard upon her. He pressed her fingers:

"You are firing my art as it has never been fired—you have given my craft all that it has lacked—yet your beauty, that exquisite thing over which you have no control, which is of no willing of yours, not even your own gift to yourself, is so subtle, so elusive, so wonderful, that all the colours of my art, all my knowledge of their use, cannot give more than a hint of that which you have, and without the asking. You are the living thing—I can at best but paint some poor suggestion of it. And when I have done, what is there in all my effort of the warmth and the sweetness, of the mystic fragrance of you? . . . Yet"—he played with her fingers—"yet," he added, "you are giving me that inspiration that will set me above my fellows—the artist has never been anything of moment until fired by the flame of a great passion—and it may be that your beauty will make my art to glow and live."

"I am glad," she said, "if I—have——"

She hesitated prettily, and he kissed her fingers.

She was really thinking that this was a doing of the thing handsomely, but young Nick Bellenden of the Guards talked less and made of loving a more exciting affair. After all, the embrace was chief part of the business—not this dandified talk.

Thus they played at half-revealed travesties of passion; she keeping back much she would not have had him guess; he himself, perhaps, only half-realizing how little he allowed her glamour to interfere with his art until the light was gone and his craft at rest. The man had not even the excuse of jumping blood, the plea of hot-headedness. He

never allowed his intrigues to interfere with his self-ordained task of setting a crown of contemporary fame upon his achievement. . . .

It was dusk when he said inquiringly :

"You'll have some tea?"

He rang the bell.

She laughed gaily :

'You have not turned on the light," she said.

He snapped the trigger of the electric switch, and the room burst into light.

An old man-servant flung open the door and entered, bearing a glittering tea-service on a silver salver. As he came into view round the edge of the high screen, Pangbutt beckoned him towards the throne :

"Set the tray by her ladyship, Dukes," said he.

The old butler set down the things on the throne at her feet.

Lady Persimmon lolled back in her chair :

"Nevertheless," she said, "I should love, just for a little while, to live in Bohemia."

Pangbutt laughed. It had been borne in upon him that this gentle beauty had deft resource and a somewhat confirmed habit in steering awkward corners. He came back to argument :

"But Bohemia, too, has its shabby side," he said—"there is spite even in Bohemia. . . . I'm afraid I'm watering down some of your illusions, Lady Persimmon."

"Ah, it's quite easy to see that *you* were not long in Bohemia—not long enough to be infected with its home-sickness."

The butler passed stealthily out of the room on silent feet—and the catch on the door faintly clicked.

The pretty woman nestled back amongst her cushions, and gazed through half-closed lids with languorous eyes at the man who poured out the tea near her feet.

"It's so pleasant," she said with a comfortable sigh, "to see the tea—the silver—the china. The fragrance of it all——"

He stopped, the silver teapot in his hand, and smiled :

"But there are no footmen in Bohemia—very little silver—very indifferent china." He handed her a cup of tea. "They live as often as not upon imagination—and mad cow is their chiefest dish."

She raised inquiring eyebrows :

"Mad cow?" she asked.

He nodded :

"Hunger," said he, and he laughed. . . . "It doesn't sound an alluring dish, does it?"

"How dreadful!" she purred, and sipped tea. "Still"—she sighed—"it must be rather exciting. It must be so romantic—to starve."

Pangbutt shrugged his shoulders :

"This is an age of romance, then," said he.

She sighed, prattling on :

"And it must be delicious to be famous."

The flattery sent a smirk to Pangbutt's lips :

"Ah, Fame——!" he said.

The handle of the door moved, clicking in its turning, and Pangbutt,

looking over his shoulder, where he stood by the edge of the great screen, saw the door open, and a haggard face look in. The intruder came into the room a step or so.

Pangbutt gasped with frank surprise:

"Anthony? Good God, where have you sprung from?"

"Sorry to come before the light has quite gone, Paul; but I'm starving."

"Starving?"

Anthony nodded his head:

"H'm, h'm! There you have the real devil in the machinery—and I'm turning on the limelight of confession." He glanced round the great studio deliberately: "This is rather a handsome room to confess in—a palace to our rooms in the old Paris days, eh?"

Pangbutt was cudgelling his wits to say something that would discover the presence of the seated lady behind the screen to the careless intruder, when Anthony strode up to him; and as the corner of the throne came into his range of vision beyond the end of the screen, he caught sight of the tray with the bright tea-things upon it.

"Food, ye gods!" he cried, and strode towards the tray. "Paul," he said hoarsely—"I must have food."

He stretched out his hand to the tray—halted—hesitated—stood up and took off his hat, as, on passing the screen, the enthroned sitter came into his view.

He bowed:

"Madame," said he—"I apologize for my want of manners. The truth is I pawned them weeks ago—with my waistcoat and the last family portrait—a miniature of my uncle the general—a most polished person, who would have died of an apoplectic fit to see himself coming to move in such mixed company——"

Pangbutt coughed; and mumbling their names, as the fashion is, he introduced them, adding:

"A friend of mine—from Bohemia."

His eyes laughed to her. He turned to Anthony as the two bowed to each other formally:

"Anthony," said he—"the sight of you takes me back to Paris—and makeshifts."

"Makeshifts!" Anthony laughed sadly, and, rousing, added—"I say, Paul, have you finished with the crumbs on that tray?"

Pangbutt uttered an embarrassed laugh, and went and rang the bell.

"Anthony was always impatient for the dinner-hour," he said—and turning to Dukes as he appeared at the door he added—"Take away the tray, Dukes——"

Anthony put out his hand:

"I say—couldn't he—leave the tray? I see some crumbs. . . . Bring another tray, Dukes."

Pangbutt signed to the old butler to wait:

"A glass of wine, Anthony?" he asked.

"Tsah! you don't understand, Paul. I'm not playing with my vitals—I'm starving, man," he said hoarsely.

"A chicken?"

"The man's a god!"

"D'you mind it cold?"

"Heavens, Paul! I shall die in the midst of all these elaborate courtesies—this rigid etiquette!"

He sank down wearily upon a corner of the painting throne, and fidgeted with the tea-things on the tray.

Pangbutt gave an embarrassed laugh, and turned to the butler:

"Dukes, bring up a tray—cold chicken—wine—anything you can get. Quick as you can."

"Yessir!" said Dukes, and formally disappeared.

The beauty had been markedly uneasy; she now rose to take her leave.

"I must be running away, Mr. Pangbutt," she said; and bowing over her shoulder to Anthony, who rose and returned her bow with stiff precision as she stepped lightly down from the throne: "So sorry!" she said.

As Pangbutt moved with her through the door she asked him in confidential undertone:

"Who's the savage? Where does he come from?"

"Bohemia," he said, with a dry mocking smile; and he lingered about her on the landing, to assist her with her cloak. He escorted her downstairs to her carriage. . . .

When they were gone from the studio, Anthony Baddlesmere rose from his seat, carrying the last piece of a tea-cake in his hand, and, walking over to the easel, as he ate the cake he regarded the picture with critical eye:

"H'm! 'Tain't bad!" he growled.

Pangbutt entered the room and shut the door.

He laughed:

"Her ladyship doesn't seem to be so enamoured of Bohemia after all," he muttered.

"Eh?" asked Anthony.

"Oh—nothing—nothing," said Pangbutt. "I am afraid we have spoilt a pretty woman's illusion."

Anthony gazed at the canvas before him:

"To destroy a pretty woman's illusions is cruel as plucking out a child's eyes," he said, and added: "Who's the doll?"

"Lady Persimmon; but——"

"What? Eleanor Persimmon, who married old Gilders Persimmon? . . . He dyed his beard for the wedding—naughty old man—and he's had to renew it ever since——"

Pangbutt went to the fireplace, and he turned and said severely:

"Sir Gilders Persimmon is not in his youth, but——"

"No, no, Paul—I'm not blaming him for being a ruin—but he's so damned badly restored." He turned to the picture. "So you are Eleanor Persimmon, my lady!" He gazed at the portrait dreamily; and, suddenly rousing, added: "Not much of a likeness, old boy, is it?"

Pangbutt smiled wryly.

Anthony peered round the easel at him:

"I suppose she babbles all the time!" said he.

Pangbutt stiffened before the fire :

" Lady Persimmon is a most charming woman," he said.

" Yes, yes ; it's in the family," Anthony said airily—" she's a sort of cousin of mine. My brother had rather a calf-love for her—when he was seventeen—and a calf."

Pangbutt flushed :

" I do not care to discuss Lady Persimmon," he said stiffly.

" No, no ; I can quite understand that," said Anthony breezily. " Nor do I—nor do I. She was always rather uninteresting."

He walked over to the throne : " Ho, ho !" thought he. " H'm ! ha ! Paul still worships the titled classes. He was always weak in the first commandment."

He sat down wearily and searched aimlessly under the little covers of the cake-dishes on the tray.

" Paul," said he, " I exaggerated when I said there were crumbs. . . ." And he added with a laugh—" I don't suppose cousin Eleanor recognised cousin Anthony—I was only sixteen—besides, she would not be prepared for his rising at her pretty feet like a down-at-heels pantomime clown in this Palace of Art—this lofty pleasure-house."

" You wrong Lady Persimmon by insinuation," said Pangbutt sulkily —" she is a woman of most generous sentiments."

Anthony uttered a funny little laughing grunt :

" Cousin Eleanor was always the soul of sentiment and—delicate self-indulgence. She used to adore the portrait of Shelley—weep over Chatterton—cry over Kit Marlowe—and—married a baronet in an advanced state of decay."

He got up, strode to the easel again, and examined the picture. Pangbutt watched him under his brows with sulky attention, lolling against the mantelpiece.

" Come, Paul, old boy," Anthony said at last—" I've been sketching the doll's soul for you ; but you've got none of *that* into her picture. . . . The colour and technique may be all there—and it is splendidly handled—*but where's the woman ?*"

Anthony's frank criticism, his just and keen appreciation of the good and the weak side of a work of art, had always won Pangbutt's admiration ; and the scowl left his eyes now as the praise bit into his conceit. The detraction passed by him :

" D'you know, Anthony," he said—" sometimes I suspect I am too successful—too easily successful—and I have a horror of becoming commonplace."

His eyes followed the other as he slouched carelessly back to the throne and flung himself upon it.

" Pooh ! Nonsense, Paul." He searched aimlessly amongst the empty plates again : " That's all cant. Look at *me*. I'm as empty as a bubble—but it's just as difficult to write sparkling prose on an empty stomach as to be a poetic alderman."

Pangbutt gazed down at his own shining boots complacently :

" I have not forgotten what personal discomfort was, in the old Paris days. I detested it. I determined from the first to be rid of it. . . . Where are you living ?"

The man that sat on the throne shrugged his shoulders, gazing at vacancy sadly :

"In a very shabby corner of Bohemia, Paul, where, in the streets, every vagrant wind makes whirlpools of stray papers—that shuffle by—like the damned restless whispering ghosts of rejected poems—or other stammerings that are the inky outpourings of broken literary careers. . . . Not at all the sort of place that you would like, old boy. . . . But, Paul"—he looked round the room—"you muttered something—about—a chicken—just now——"

Paul laughed—a little embarrassedly ; and rang the bell :

"You'd like to take off your overcoat?" he asked.

Anthony laughed drily :

"Tsh ! Paul !—we'll avoid delicate subjects, please. But since I am in the confessional, I ought to add that I haven't a coat or waistcoat. Misfortune makes us acquainted with strange underclothes."

Paul Pangbutt smiled ; but a frown followed close upon the smile, and blackened it. He was possessed of that peculiar egoism which, at the sight of the pitiful, is but roused to a delicious self-pity.

"Ah," said he ; and a little suspicion of patronage slipped into his manner, as it does when we are content to comfort our friends with phrases—"I have not forgotten what makeshifts were in Paris—before I made my mark. . . . I always detested frayed cuffs."

A funny little smile played about the lips of the seated man ; he nodded grimly :

"H'm, yes. Having no shirt at all has *that* advantage—the cuffs do not fray."

Pangbutt's scowl came flitting back :

"Yes ; I know. . . . You and the others always made a jest of the disgusting pinch and meanness of it all——"

The weary man nodded :

"Ah, yes, it's true," said he, and he sighed—"the road was very weary—very dusty—sometimes—in Paris."

The other strode vigorously up and down the room, with that vigour that had set him on the road to success : his eyes were fixed within :

"But *I* determined at the first chance I got to shake off that dust of the students' quarter of Paris. I detested the untidiness of them all—the leanness and the grim jest of it—and the everlasting loans that were never paid."

Anthony's face, as he watched the impatient striding from under his brows, listening to the triumphant note of success, flickered with a grim smile. Paul Pangbutt had not been exactly notorious for the lending of loans. It came to him that his quest for help was not going to be an easy one.

The other suddenly came to a halt, and looked keenly at Anthony where he sat ; remembering that this brooding man was the real subject of talk, he added :

"But—are things really as low with you as you say, Anthony? . . . You always made a jest of hard work."

Anthony laughed sadly :

"And sometimes we got a good deal of hard work out of a jest; eh, Paul?" The smile died out of his eyes as soon as he had spoken :

"No," he added, "there's no jest in it—unless the gods laugh at misfortune. . . . I am about at the end of things."

Pangbutt assumed the fatherly note :

"Anthony," said he—"I hope you will not mind my saying so, but you were always most reckless in your expenditure—or rather in your loans to all that army of hangers-on about you."

It came to Anthony, as he stood in the withering blight of this man's lack of sympathy, that if he were going to ask for help he must set aside all delicacy and put the situation before him bluntly. He made an unwilling start :

"Some years ago, Paul," he said, "after you had made your mark in Paris, and were doing the round of the foreign courts, you no doubt heard that Caroline made rather a sensation with a book."

Pangbutt nodded :

"I have read it," he said—but his attitude was enigma.

Anthony was relieved to find there was to be no oratorial protest in honour of Style. He went on as though repeating a distasteful task he had set himself :

"It has been attacked from all sides. It is as dead—as—a railway sandwich."

"That is rather a misfortune," said Pangbutt.

Anthony laughed. He felt strangely ashamed—of himself—of his friend. And it flashed through his thinking parts, with lightning stroke, that this was the man whom Caroline had nursed through the typhoid.

He was roused from his reflections by Pangbutt's sharp question :

"And you?"

He searched about in his mind for what he had last said :

"Eh? Me? Oh, ah, yes ; I tried to grow a garden of literature in Fleet Street—to bring to blossom the tender buds of the new school of thought. But my star was not in journalism. My paper was burnt up in the fire of the young immortals who flocked to my office, whose masterpieces few would buy—or read." He smiled a wan smile, and sighed : "The paper has gone into ash. . . . That's why, when the wind blows keen, there is so much dust in Fleet Street."

Pangbutt's eyes were fixed critically upon his own survey of this man's past, and he had but half listened to the other's words :

"On the whole," said he drily, "you have not been very fortunate, then?"

Anthony laughed sadly, but said nothing.

It was definitely borne in upon him that he would never be able to ask this man for money.

The other was embarrassed by the silence :

"What are you going to do?" he asked uncomfortably.

Anthony roused himself. He took up the thread of his appeal, but he now went on vaguely—he felt that it was hopeless :

"Oh, ah, yes. . . . Well, my verse is sunk to the honour of neglect —which is not a matter wholly wanting in subtle flattery, since all the clever young men tell me it is the reward of true poetry. But—here's food!" he cried, as the door opened and the butler entered, carrying a tray, well laden : "Here's food—so poetry go hang!" He seized the

carving-knife almost before Dukes had set down the tray; and the austere servant took up the other discarded empty tray and softly withdrew from the room. "A most radiant fowl!" cried Anthony, carving it with swift precision. . . . "I say, Paul—you won't mind my taking the wings in my pocket for the youngster—he's been a little sickly of late!"

He carved off the wings and breast, and his searching glance fell on a large handsome quarto that lay upon the throne by his side.

"Hullo!" said he—"a large-paper edition!" He turned it over and saw that it was verse. "What idiot has been writing verses now?"

Pangbutt smiled:

"That's a volume of collected poems by Sir Gilders Persimmon," he said.

"Indecent old thing! . . . May I have the flyleaf for the chicken?"

Pangbutt almost put out his hand in panic, fearing sacrilege; but he said instead, rather stiffly:

"It is an autograph copy from my friend, Sir Gilders Persimmon; and——"

"Yes, yes—quite so. It's luxury to write poetry when you're rich," he said—"poetry should be handsomely treated."

"Ah, Anthony—we scoff at riches——"

"Who scoffs at riches?" Anthony looked up sharply.

"We all sneer at times."

Anthony laughed:

"They don't trouble *my* sleep much—not half so much as the lack of them."

Pangbutt smiled drily:

"Well," said he—"you confess by insinuation that it's very pleasant to be even so discredited a thing as a millionaire?"

"I don't know, Paul. I don't call on 'em. When all's said, they are no worse than the folk who do call on 'em. The rich man, too, stands before his abysses—he has his blood-curdlings like the poorest. . . . There are honest men and dishonest, even amongst the rich. Look at your speculative millionaire—your mighty company-promoter! He don't sleep too well, thank God; but look at him. . . . To-day, society is licking his boots—licking them, Paul—for who so sublime a boot-licker as your hereditary flunkey of the Court? To-morrow—— Hang it, I'm talking like a curate." He laughed. "I always gabble of millionaires in my sleep when the landlady is pressing for the rent."

Pangbutt shrugged his shoulders:

"Nevertheless," said he—"there's something rather wonderful about a millionaire."

"A very proper and right sentiment, Paul! Of course, a milliona.re is a colossal article of commerce. Bigness appeals to the imagination. So a schoolboy looks at a bishop and thinks the works of God are very wonderful. . . . But riches are comparative—there's a millionaire who cannot buy a digestion. Give me a competency——"

Pangbutt's lip curled:

"How much is a competency? he asked

"H'm—well——"

He stood up suddenly, listening.

There was a distant ring of a bell.

Anthony hurriedly folded his handkerchief over the scraps of food, and thrust them into his pocket.

He strode towards Pangbutt as though to say something—hesitated—he could not bring himself to ask for money. There was a second peal at the bell.

"I must be off," he said—"I hear visitors."

And waving his hand to Pangbutt he stepped quickly to the doorway.

When he reached the door he again hesitated—shook his head—and letting himself quietly out, closed the door gently after him.

Paul Pangbutt was alone.

He stood brooding.

His lips moved into a complacent smile:

"I believe my success awed him," he said.

CHAPTER VII

Wherein Ambition shrinks from looking down the Ladder

THE brooding man was still standing in the middle of the great studio when the butler entered, with catlike tread, and handed him a card on a silver salver.

Pangbutt took the card without looking at it.

"Take away the tray, Dukes," he said.

He pointed with a trace of disgust to the broken meats, and, as he watched the silent servant gathering up the relics of the hurried feast, all that shabby Bohemian life, the very thought of which he had banished for years, came flooding back with disgust across the threshold of his splendid home. . . . How he loathed it! . . . But—the strange irony of it all! That the brilliant ones of the time of his pupillage should have gone under! . . . He himself had been the commonplace one, the near to dullard—he smiled—but here was he, and there were they! . . . Strange how the promise of youth is unfulfilled! . . . The Baddlesmeres gone under! God! they of all people! . . . Whilst for him? Fame, stretching out a vast glittering prospect as he topped the hill of endeavour. . . . He had left no smallest effort unmade to advance his own interests—and he stood at last in view of the promised land where hang the glittering prizes. By heavens! they were within hand's reach——

He was roused by the butler's voice, as the old servant opened the door to depart:

"And this gentleman downstairs, sir?" said he.

"Ah, yes." Pangbutt glanced at the card in his fingers:

"Eustace Lovegood!" he murmured in surprise. "H'm—he sends up his card—evidently all goes well with Eustace Lovegood!"

He turned to Dukes:

"All right—show him up."

The old servant vanished, the door stealthily closing after him.

Pangbutt's face was scarred with a self-satisfied smirk: "They find me in rather altered circumstances."

There was no mistaking the comfort of the reflection.

He was about to stride towards the fireplace and take up a baronial attitude, but put his hands behind his back instead, and stared at the floor, pondering. He tried to rouse his memory:

"But—let me see—Lovegood made rather a mark? What was it?"

The door opened, and Eustace Lovegood strode tragically into the room, the old black cloak swinging at his back.

Pangbutt turned: "O lord!" he growled into his beard, "another of the failures!"

He eyed Lovegood cynically until he halted; and, seeing that he would have to speak, he said:

"You asked to see me, Mr. Lovegood."

Lovegood put his heels together and bowed.

Pangbutt had to speak again.

"Can I do anything for you?" he asked.

Eustace Lovegood strode up to him, put his strong hand on his shoulder, and looked him in the face:

"Nothing," he said in his deep bass—"nothing . . . except to remember that we were once friends."

Pangbutt, in spite of a biting desire to play the swaggering lord, at once took the defensive. This man made him feel diffident even on his own elaborate carpet.

"Why do you choose to remind me of that to-night?" he asked sullenly, trying to assert himself.

Eustace took his hand from his shoulder, and fixed his gloomy eyes upon him:

"As I stood in the shadows of your hall just now," said he slowly, "Anthony Baddlesmere passed out."

Pangbutt uttered a light cynical laugh:

"What?" said he—"without nodding to you?"

Lovegood's great brows met in a black frown:

"His eyes were on a broken career. . . . But I saw that he had not yet become a good beggar."

A sneer curled the bearded lips of the other:

"And you?" he asked flippantly.

"I am better practised. . . . I have come to beg for him."

Pangbutt's lips curled into a deeper contempt:

"Yes," said he—"you were always a good borrower, Eustace Lovegood."

"I have not grown rich upon it."

"So I see."

Lovegood smiled grimly:

"Do I owe you anything?" he asked.

Pangbutt hesitated:

"N-no," he said; "I am bound to confess—not for yourself."

"Perhaps your confession involves by implication that there may be virtue even in borrowing—for those in need!"

"I cannot deny it."

"Then I have grown virtuous—I have come to borrow. . . . Nay, man—to ask you to pay back. . . . Anthony Baddlesmere—did he want help?"

"He did not ask for help," said the painter lamely.

The eyes of the great tragic man before him saw into the nakedness of his very conceit; and Paul Pangbutt realized that his chief weapon,

his cold pride of egoism, was useless against the truth-seeking eyes of Eustace Lovegood—was without awe to him. He recoiled under the calm eyes of this big gentle fellow as he spoke:

"Paul—you never could see the soul in a man . . . You could only value what part of him could be bought in shops, or whittled into shapes in the academies. The man who was here to-night is almost destitute. Anthony and Caroline Baddlesmere — who were the Bountifuls to all of us in Paris—destitute!"

"I am not the cause of it," Pangbutt answered sullenly.

An ugly frown came over the big man's eyes:

"No, but he helped you to this." He swept his hand round the room slowly. "He gave you a footing at the Embassy in Paris. . . . I need not go into details. . . . The rest is here. And you could let him leave your house ashamed to ask for help!"

Pangbutt made an effort to take the domineering careless attitude; but he realized that his play-acting was worse than lost on this man's grim regard.

"I did not grasp that it was so serious, Lovegood. . . . I will—drop in one day—and—see if something cannot be done——"

He saw the smile of contempt move the pale heavy features of Eustace Lovegood as he shrugged his huge shoulders, and, with an exhaustive snort of disgust, strode slowly out of the room.

The door closed after him with a loud resounding slam, rattled on its hinges, and was still.

Pangbutt stood brooding with frowning eyes fixed upon it:

He shrugged his shoulders:

"Lovegood never loses the grand manner," he thought, "even when he has no necktie. Damnation! the Past seems never to be buried. . . . We think the day is dead because we blow out the candle and lie down at night. We forget the world's the same—'tis we that sleep. Tush! the Past is never dead—until it's our winding-sheet——"

He saw himself reflected in a large mirror. He gazed at the well-groomed man of the world that stood there in the mirrored make-believe room, solid as he; and he laughed bitterly as it came to him that this dandified spruce shadow that mimicked his magnificence had thought to shake off at a wish the years of sordid striving together with the Things that had been Done and Rejected and—Forsaken! . . . Tshah; he had been congratulating this spruce fellow upon it only a few minutes gone by—thanking his most gentlemanly star that he had done with the whole gang. And to-day—they were pushing stealthily at his doors, creeping into his magnificent home, nay, bursting into his life again—thrusting jeering faces into his, whether he would or not. Indeed, his smug shadow sneered at him—for behind the well-bred silence of his old comrades was the knowledge of his low origin—and he had no pride in aught but hiding what had been to a bigger man his source of pride.

Perhaps he ought to help—for decency's sake; but——

Strange — these were the very people who had given him his chance in life. But for them, he had still been a mediocrity in Paris.

But why should he have the whole crew "hail-fellow"?

If a man is to rise above the crowd he must stand alone—be rid of encumbrances——

He started :

A door slammed below.

There was the loud noise of a gathering tumult without. It was coming up the stairs—his stairs !

"Curse it ! is all Bedlam abroad to-night ?" said he.

He strode angrily towards the uproar beyond the great folding doors ; but they were flung open, and there entered a gust of loud laughter and the shuffle of many feet upon the stairs.

CHAPTER VIII

Wherein it is discovered that the Strength of Genius may lie in the Hair

WITH a loud shout of laughter there burst riotously into the room several young fellows, pushing before them the indignant and expostulating Lovegood.

A shock-headed fellow, Rippley the sculptor, dressed with the picturesque carelessness of an art student, left the others, advanced to their scowling host, and said breezily :

" Look 'ere, Paul Pangbutt—the boys have come to give old Jack Lawrence a house-warming—down the street, you know."

" Indeed !" said Pangbutt icily ; and with cutting coldness he added : " I presume that this news should interest me !"

Rippley was hugely pleased :

' Yes, rather ! He's setting up a studio almost next door to you—but the old rip isn't in this evening ; so, as we have the beer and stuff in a dray outside, we've converted it into a surprise party for you instead, d'you see ?"

Pangbutt's blanched face was moved to a sneer :

" Really, so spontaneous an honour cannot but flatter," he said.

" Of course," roared Rippley jovially. He went up to his sulky host and slapped him on the shoulder. It floated through Pangbutt's mind with something like a twinge of jealousy that they had never given *him* a house-warming when he took his studio, months ago now.

" Oh, yes," he said bitterly—" make yourselves at home."

The sculptor gave him a sounding thump on the shoulder :

" That's a good generous fellow !" cried he, and winked at the others. " All the scum of Bohemia is coming here to-night. We have invited 'em—in your name. . . . *Of course* you don't mind. I *said* you wouldn't."

Through the open door there came gusts of hilarity from below, and the sound of horseplay.

The sculptor chuckled.

Pangbutt scowled :

" Oh, no—treat the place like a pot-house," he said. " Of course I am delighted," he added ironically.

Rippley turned and winked an eye solemnly at the others ; he burst

into a jovial laugh, and gripping Pangbutt's shoulder with his great hand :

"Good old Paul," cried he—"of course you are ! . . . But we found old Lovegood before us—the sly old dog."

He left his sulky host, and, walking up to Lovegood, punched his embarrassed bulk in the ribs.

Lovegood strode over to the brooding man :

"Pangbutt," he said—"you would rather have them go. Why don't you say so ?"

"No, no—let them alone."

He waved the subject aside irritably with his hand, and walked impatiently to the fireplace, where he turned and, leaning his shoulders against the mantel, scowled at the riot.

There was a shuffle of feet, as of men carrying a heavy burden, and, with a roar, the noisy crew swung through the great doorway and came swarming into the room, headed by half a dozen that carried a full beer-barrel on slings, followed by a red-headed fellow frantically blaring a trombone before another who carried Andrew Blotte upon his shoulders, crowned with a wreath of roses and considerably the worse for strong liquors.

They gave their sulking host a shout as they streamed in. The rest of the noisy crew, talking and laughing, escorted a couple of pretty but gauche girl-models, who were awkwardly carrying bouquets as they might have carried cabbages ; long streamers of coloured ribbon hung from their nosegays.

The barrel was carried at the run to the most handy armchair, and plumped into the seat. The handicraftsmen of Louis Quinze must have turned in their graves—it was a fine specimen of the period. With a whoop they set hiccuping Andrew Blotte astride of the barrel —one of the girls, picking up his wreath of roses, which had fallen to the floor, set it awry on his head. From under its shadow his eyes blinked drunkenly at the room.

The men were all smoking.

Rippley came forward and, addressing Pangbutt, said :

"You don't mind our smoking, eh ?"

Pangbutt shrugged his shoulders :

"I was not aware my permission was necessary—but of course——"

"*Of course* you don't," roared Rippley ; and turning to the others he put his tongue in his cheek :

"Gentlemen, you may smoke," said he ; "nor, indeed, has friend Paul any conscientious objections to the ladies smokin'." He turned to the red-haired man with the trombone :

"Milk the bell," said he, "my fluffsome Reubens."

The red-haired fellow with the incipient beard, whom they called Fluffy Reubens, uttered a startled wail on the trombone, and walking over to the bell-pull, tolled the bell solemnly as he might have milked a cow.

He smiled at the peal that rang and rang through the house :

"It's rather a good bell," said he. "Nothing throaty about its top notes." He turned to his scowling host : "We will put you to as little trouble as possible, Paul," he said—"so I ring the bell. But if

you would not mind asking your swoggle-eyed bottle-washer for the glasses it wouldn't strain the etiquette——"

Rippley burst out laughing :

"That idiotic hireling man of yours thought we were bailiffs—his language was really quite naughty—for a butler. So Fluffy flung himself at his old legs and I clapped a hand over his fowling-piece—the language was within an ace of being obscene. We whipped him off his legs and sat on his chest and head, or he would have bawled murder. Of course we *quite* understand, indeed sympathize with, his haughty attitude towards tax-gatherers ; but we cannot lightly put aside his stone-blindness to genius when he sees it in full flare of the electric light——" The old butler, sulky as his master, appeared at the door and stood there with stiff dignity. Rippley turned to him :

"Glasses, mister !" cried he.

The old servant took not the slightest notice—he was deaf to all vulgar appeal.

Pangbutt nodded to him :

"Glasses, Dukes," he said.

"Yessir."

The old man solemnly turned and left the room.

Fluffy Reubens, who had been gazing sentimentally at the portrait upon the easel, turned to the gilt chair that yawned empty amidst its picturesque setting on the painter's throne :

"What ! the society beauty has flown !"

Rippley kissed his hand to the portrait :

"I put it," said he, "that Eustace Lovegood take the beauty's chair."

There was a din of acclamation ; and the big man stepped tragically on to the throne and took the seat. His pale face smiled.

"This is no longer a vulgar brawl," said he—"but an ordered debauch."

Rippley turned and, staring at Blotte where he sat solemnly astride of the cask, blinking drunkenly from under his wreath, gave him a hail :

"Cheer up, my bilious Bacchus !" cried he. "A smile to greet this picnic !"

Lovegood coughed :

"But what is Bacchus without the cup?" said he.

Andrew Blotte, astride the cask, raised his hand as for oration, but overbalanced and tumbled from the barrel to the carpet. Several sprang to help him to his feet ; and as he stood with difficulty they restored his fallen wreath. He strode with drunken solemnity into the middle of the room, towards his host, where he stood brooding before the fireplace ; and as Blotte came the scowl left the hard pale face of the other, and his mouth fell open a little way—but he took command of himself in the winking of an eyelid, and the blood poured back into his heart :

"My God !" slipped from him in a hoarse whisper ; "Andrew Blotte !"

Andrew Blotte pulled himself up to a halt, and blinking at his memory, shuffling amongst the faces that were ghosts of the past, he

tried to gather his rambling thoughts together, and said with slow precision and friendly confidence :

"I once knew a—fellow (hic)—rather like you. . . . Clean-shaven poetic-looking fellow, rather good-looking—nevertheless—rather like you." He giggled drunkenly. "He—*he* thought he could paint, too." He blew through his lips. "We all thought we could do things—in Paris. . . . Youth lives on illusions——"

It struck Paul Pangbutt as he stood there, his arms folded before him, and his eyes set on the poor drunken wreck of a once brilliant youth, that it was nothing less than devil's irony that had sent *this* broken man into his life *this* night—the night which his profession might, as likely as not, have chosen to do him honour—it was the evening of the elections at the Academy.

Blotte roused ; and added solemnly :

"He was one of your good fellows—always the fine gentleman—with as keen an eye on his dignity as—a—colonial bishop. Nevertheless, he was rather like you." He sniggered, and came closer to Pangbutt ; gazing at him hazily he added : "You'll excuse me, but I've quite forgotten the point—and I can't remember your name. . . . We have not been formally introduced—there is that excuse for us. . . . Oh, ah, yes, though—I remember—to be sure—(hic)—yes. He stood just about your height—he was a good-looking fellow—whee-hew—better-looking fellow than you. . . . Of course—that's strictly between you and me and"—he swept his hand towards the silent others—"and pandlemonium ! . . . Looked like a poet—but his brain was—mostly—self-respect. . . . That was *it—he* looked a man—*I* was wholly insignificant. . . . *He* had the grand manner—*I* didn't give a slop-can for manners. Never did. Always had a positive idioshincrasy against dancing-masters—except for dancing. . . . Of course," he added slowly, gazing with heavy eyes into the past—"of course when a woman appeared on the scene, he—cut me out—hiccup——"

A sneer came to Pangbutt's pale lips :

"Indeed !" said he. "Such modesty——"

"Sit down, Blotte," roared the sculptor, Rippley.

The poor drunken fellow took no slightest notice of the interruption, but continued his tale:

"Of course—it was easy enough. It wasn't worth scoring the trick. But—he was a shabby devil—though he stood just about your height. . . ." He whistled aimlessly. . . . "About this time, what d'you think ? the fellow got into the Embassy set—hiccup—God knows how ! . . . Don't ask me. . . . The Baddlesmeres were connected with Embassy people—and the fellow got a footing. . . . Cæsar was always ambitious. . . . So he dropped Kate Ormsby—poor little devil ! . . . She was such a pretty creature—and I spent the rest of my youth in telling her that the fellow would come back to her—God forgive me ! . . ."

Pangbutt shifted uneasily ; but his cynical voice showed no uneasiness :

"Really," said he coldly—"your biography is not without romance, Mr. Blotte."

"Quite so," said Blotte. "She sings outside taverns now. . . .

I consider it a most damned unladylike thing to do. . . . Saw her —last winter—snow on ground—and formally asked her hand in marriage—hiccup. But," he smiled, "she—hiccup—she said I wasn't sober. . . . Rather bad taste of her, I thought——"

The man-servant entered the room with the glasses on a tray; Fluffy Reubens nudged Rippley, and jerked his thumb towards Blotte.

"Sit down, Blotte," cried Fluffy Reubens—"and dry up."

"Aha!" cried Rippley—"the glasses, gentlemen! Blotte, I give you better advice—come and be moistened."

The drunken man nodded to his host:

"You'll excuse me," he said; and he strolled off unsteadily towards the glasses.

There was a loud shout of laughter, as Rippley, to cause a diversion, poured a libation of beer on the old butler's bald head, dedicating him to Venus: the old man, with the beer trickling down his nose, and scorn upon his lip, solemnly withdrew.

Rippley started the cask of beer, the girls handing the glasses about as they were filled.

Lovegood, master of the revels, coughed:

"How naturally Rippley presides at the cask!" said he. "Heaven meant him for an honest publican; but native conceit, or some other maggot in the brain, turned his hands to sculpture."

Pangbutt fretted in sullen silence, wondering when the crew would be done and gone. He even told himself that it would have been less embarrassing if he had gone to see the Baddlesmeres—and for the rest of the evening he brooded upon it.

Lovegood sat back in his chair, glad to get all eyes away from the host:

"Ah, English-brewed ale to-night!" said he tragically. "None of your sour wines of France." He turned to one of the girl-models—"Sweet Andromache, a tankard fer the chair!" said he.

The girl carried beer to him in a tumbler, giggling.

"No, no—give me the juice of the pagan grape—of such alone is brewed the nectar of the gods!" said a slim man who lounged on a sofa, glass in hand. He was Aubrey, the poet, and he was as beautiful as a woman, and with his mass of dark hair drawn from his brows and hiding his ears he looked like one: "Ah, that dissipation should destroy the complexion, and to be intoxicated should have grown unpoetic—to be drunk and disorderly simply to be sordid! The exquisite orgies of the deliciously wicked Greeks are done. The Bacchic frenzy is dead. Nay, Pan—even Pan—Pan is dead."

Tears came to the eyes of Andrew Blotte, and he shook his head sadly. The wreath came over one eye.

Lovegood blew his nose dramatically:

"Poor, poor Pan!" said he. "Really it is quite a tearful statement. It had escaped me that it was the anniversary of Pan." He turned to the girl-model they called Andromache and held out his empty tumbler: "Repeat the dose, therefore, Andromache," said he; "we must drink to the translation of Pan—since we cannot go to his funeral. Though I don't wholly give up Pan on Aubrey's mere

report. Poets are so scandalous; they will make any misstatement to fit a rhyme—or blast careers to assist a dramatic situation."

Rippley withdrew his nose from a foaming glass of beer:

"I wish you poet johnnies would bury Pan," he said. "You're always diggin' 'im up—or the other dead Greeks."

Aubrey yawned wearily:

"Don't jabber art, Rippley. You make my head ache. . . ."

Pangbutt roused, and, walking over to Lovegood, asked him in a whisper for the Baddlesmeres' address. The big man fumbled in the breast-pocket of his shiny black coat.

A shout of protest caught his attention.

"Nonsense, Aubrey," cried Rippley—"sheer nonsense!"

Lovegood looked up, and put out his hand:

"Order, gentlemen!" said he in thundering bass. "It is most unseemly to insinuate that poets talk nonsense."

He searched again for the pencil, and wrote the address on the other's cuff. They were roused from their colloquy by a quarrel. Pangbutt returned to the fireplace, his brows set.

Lovegood stood up:

"Order, gentlemen, order!" he called.

Aubrey languidly appealed to him from the sofa:

"Rippley says he has an idea," he complained pathetically.

Lovegood motioned for silence:

"Hush, Aubrey! you should never repeat a scandal," said he.

Rippley laughed:

"I have, though—a rippin' idea!"

"Really?" said Lovegood, and he coughed. "Attention, gentlemen—whilst Mr. Rippley yields up an entirely original and rippin' idea!"

Rippley sniggered:

"You make me feel quite nervous," he said. "But—*you* know, I've got a rippin' idea for a statoo: A fellow struggling alone against the weight of his pre-ordained destiny, which keeps coming back on 'im, don't you know! He works for Fame, but finds his load getting heavier and heavier to his hand. Ambition, Pluck, Endurance—all are no good. Doom broods over all—Span of Life don't give enough time—Age creeps on and numbs his Strength. And when the poor devil gets near the top of the hill, there stands Death at the summit to cut him down at the end of his labours—and he sees the night-mist of Oblivion stretching beyond—a mist in which the greatest names are faintly dying away——"

"But, my dear plasterer," said Fluffy Reubens, "how are you going to express this in stone?"

"That's just it!" said the tousle-headed sculptor, warm to his idea. "That Greek Johnny that pushed a great hanking stone up a hill, and kept letting it go again——" He made an effort to recall the name and shook his head: "No, it wasn't 'Erkyools——"

Aubrey tittered, and languidly corrected him with cutting precision:

"Her—cu—les, Rippley—Hercules!"

"No, no—it wasn't 'im," said Rippley impatiently. "T'other fellow."

"Rippley," said the languid poet, turning half-shut eyes of contempt upon him, "your originality staggers me."

"Ra-ther!" said Rippley. "When I got that idea you could have knocked me down with the brains of a minor poet."

Lovegood coughed:

"The Grecian gentleman who pushed the—er—hanking great stone up the hill," said he with measured accent, "I have read somewhere, was called Sisyphus."

Rippley bounced and clutched at the air.

"Sisyphus—that's the chap! . . . Knew Aubrey was wrong about its being 'Erkyools. . . . Rummy things the old Greeks used to do! luckily for sculpture and the schoolmasters." He bent his eyes on his idea again: "But what licks me is Fame! . . . Such a comical thing is Fame! . . . Now, look at this fellow Sisyphus: A great muscular chap pushes the dickens of a big stone up a hill, and keeps having to let it go again before he reaches the top. It ain't much to build a reputation on. But Plato or some blanky poet comes along and writes it down—and that fellow goes pushing and heaving that stone up a hill through the ages. Then look at Aubrey—*he* works just as hard at his confounded rhymes; yet no one reads *him*, but everyone goes on talking about 'Omer."

"Omar Khayyam?" asked Aubrey flippantly.

"Khayyam be damned!" said the shock-headed sculptor. "No—old 'Omer 'imself. A fine, hairy old fellow, with big workmanlike head! Good solid old poetry! None of your rhymes and jingles and frills and coloured neckties and long nails and modern——"

Lovegood tapped his glass on the arm of the judgment-seat:

"It is the painful duty of the chair," said he, "to remind our sculptor that he claims to have been infected with an *original* and rippin' idea."

Rippley shook himself peevishly:

"This bleating minor poet keeps diggin' his dandified elbow into my ideas until he makes 'em sulk in their tents like—like Ash-heels."

"Achilles, Rippley—Achilles!" cooed the poet gently.

Rippley turned upon him:

"I say, poet," said he, walking up to the languid Aubrey, "you're looking sallow; you poets don't take enough exercise. I bet I put you under that sofa."

Aubrey rose to his feet in alarm, and took up a mild attitude of protest:

"Now, don't be vulgar, Rippley!" said he.

But the thick-set little sculptor jumped at him and bore him to the ground. The two rolled on the carpet until Rippley, getting the grip of the plaintive poet, pushed his slim figure, expostulating, beneath the sofa, where he disappeared from view under its hangings, amidst a roar of applause.

Lovegood coughed:

"Poetry is fallen on rough times indeed," said he.

Pangbutt stood frowning at the riot. How these tomfools took him back to the years of his insignificance and Paris!

The door was flung open and a stoutish woman, her hands thrust in

the side-pockets of her jacket, stepped into the doorway with swaggering stride. Glancing calmly round the room, she called airily, in a strident, jolly voice:

"How do, Pangbutt?"

She nodded to him:

"They told me this rotten party was to be at Jack Lawrence's. But his place is as black as your blooming frontispiece. I've been huntin' for this scum all over the shop, until a policeman sniggered and told me there was a deal of cock-crowin' goin' on here." She turned to the roomful of them: "Hullo, boys! and what are you all up to? . . . Nothing unladylike, I hope, eh?"

She laughed the question jovially.

"No, no," they all cried.

Blotte waved his arm, standing by the barrel:

"Come along, jovial Emma," said he, and hiccuped.

"Eh?" she queried; "quite sure I'm not——"

"No, no," they chorused. "Come along!"

Blotte took up an oratorical attitude by the beer-cask:

"Come in—rollicking Emma—you're making quite a draught—gives me—hic—quite a chill. I must have something to warm me—from within outwards."

He drew his empty tumbler out of his pocket.

Emma laughed shrilly, and flung the door to:

"My word," cried she, "you *are* going it! . . . Heigho! I say, boys, I have only a paragraph or two to send in to the papers and I'm finished; so let me rest. . . . Which is the largest and most comfortable seat?"

She moved towards the empty sofa.

As she swung herself round to sit down, she said shrilly:

"Don't see that poetic idiot Aubrey here. Where's he braying to-night?"

"He isn't braying, robustious Emma," said Lovegood from the chair. "He's on all fours, eating the thistles of humiliation."

Emma Hartroff plumped her weight on to the sofa, and a wail arose from under her.

She started—then laughed:

"Bless my soul! I have known a sofa to groan before—but this one cries out!" she rattled; and added indignantly:

"As if I didn't know my figure was gone!"

Aubrey's voice came plaintively from under her foundations:

"Most adorable Emma," he groaned.

Lovegood coughed:

"You press heavily upon a poet's husk," he said solemnly. "Arise, madam, as you love poetry, and free him."

Emma arose.

As Aubrey crawled out, all tousled and tossed, from under the sofa, a shout went up. He gathered himself on to his feet and brushed his knees.

She sat down:

"The ecstatic ass is not dead, after all," she said.

Aubrey bowed, polite and affected as always:

"Ah, madam," said he—'the weight of your opposition crushes me."

Lovegood chuckled :

"But you have not his death upon your conscience, glorious Emma. The recorded word remains unbroken—no one has yet seen a dead donkey."

Emma Hartroff shrugged her shoulders :

"That is of no consequence," she said. "But there are other—serious things. There's no doubt about it—I've begun to apologize for my figure."

"Hush, Emma!" Lovegood's pale face became serious "You should never apologize for the acts of Providence. It s most irreligious."

Aubrey, who had taken his stand against the end of the sofa, folded his arms, and said absently :

> "'The wit that rouses rippling laughter now,
> May be but winnow'd chaff at fifty—
> Raise but a cackling laugh at fourscore years.'"

They all thumped on the tables and tapped heels upon the floor :

"Certainly," cried the chorus.

Emma Hartroff stood up :

"Tsh!" she hushed ; "let the inspired idiot speak."

She sat down in a hush of silence.

Aubrey ran his hands through his hair :

"'The eyes that catch our eyes, and check our breath with sweet, delicious ecstasies
May be but line-marked eyes, with disillusion'd sight at fifty—
Tear-fill'd, and inward cast in age's loneliness at fourscore years.
But shall we therefore fear to laugh—since jests grow old?
Or cease to garner for old age's ease—since graveyards yawn alike for spendthrift and for thrifty?
Shall we fulfil, with homage of a loveless life, black Pessimism's scold
That that we do matters as little, after the years we lease, as the worn idols to whom none now bow?'"

Emma Hartroff, pointing to the vacant place beside her, waved him to it :

"H'm! . . . Sit down, Aubrey."

Aubrey sat down, and, lolling back comfortably in the corner of it, he spread himself out luxuriously.

Andrew Blotte cheered :

"Excellent! Ex'lent!" he said solemnly. "That ain't—hiccup—altogether bad. . . . Wonderful thing, genius!"

Lovegood tapped on his chair-arm, and there was silence :

"It is my painful duty," said he, rising to his feet, "to put it to the republic of letters that our poet be not again heard this evening."

They all held out their hands, and solemnly turned their thumbs down.

Lovegood nodded gloomily :

"The ayes have it," he said. . . . "Citizens, I thank you for recording in dignified silence the contempt which you felt compelled

to express for so pathetic an exhibition of mediocrity." He sighed sadly. "Beer, please, coy Andromache! . . ."

Blotte strolled unsteadily over to where Emma Hartroff sat on the sofa; and straddling out his legs he gazed at her pensively—the wreath of roses awry over his brow.

"Well, my merry Andrew," said she, 'get it off your chest. What's worrying you?"

"Emma," said he slowly, "you don't do yourself justice." He put his head on one side critically, and uttered a rending hiccup: "you ought to (hiccup) put plum-juice on the—lobes—of your ears. It would make you look so voluptuous."

"Get out," said she. "But look here, Master Andrew, what have *you* been doing of late?"

He stood swaying and balancing himself, the wreath awry on his head, and hiccuped:

"I've been trying to discover the source of heartburn in a radish," he said. "Sorry I can't stay any longer, adorable Emma," he added flirtily, "but will you come with me to the sunny south to see the almonds bloom?"

"Oh—get out!"

He sighed:

"Well—I must go alone." And he added dramatically, spilling much beer in Emma's lap: "Away from this black cauldron of the city, to meet the pageant of the Spring!"

He turned and shuffled over slowly to Paul Pangbutt:

"Good-bye, old—Polyglot! . . ." He crooned. "I forget your name—but I'm sorry I can't stay. . . . This palace of varieties" (he waved his arm round the room) is most alluring—but I'm sorry—I can't stay."

Pangbutt nodded, humouring him:

"I understand," he said.

"Of course you do." Blotte burst out into a great laugh. He suddenly button-holed him again: "I say, I suppose *you* wouldn't care to—come—and see the almonds bloom?"

He gazed at his dandified host, and slowly shook his head. The wreath came down over one eye:

"You won't come to meet the pageant of the Spring?"

He shook his head in answer to the other's shake; and, turning clumsily, lurched towards the door.

Emma Hartroff called to him from her sofa:

"Where are you going, Blotte?"

At the door Blotte halted and faced the room:

"Goo'-night!" he said. "I would embrace you, Emma, but there are so many of you it would seem polygamous."

He squealed gaily, and kicked out a leg—it nearly flung him off his feet.

As he fumbled at the handle:

"Quite sure," said he, hanging to the door, "quite sure you won't all come—and walk on air—and—sing?"

He shook his head sadly:

"Will no one come with me to see the almonds bloom?" said he; and fell through the doorway with a clatter, his feet inside.

Pangbutt hurried after him :

"A moment," said he, as he passed Lovegood. "I'll see him out. My guests do not require a host."

Lovegood smiled grimly :

"No," said he—"they are a host in themselves."

The door closed on Pangbutt.

A titter went round the room.

Emma Hartroff sat up suddenly on the sofa :

"I say, boys," said she, "Anthony Baddlesmere's a bit down at heels, ain't he? Eh? . . . Met him an hour ago—looked as if he'd pawned his shirt. I should have thought Caroline Baddlesmere's book——"

Aubrey opened a sleepy eye where he lay on the sofa :

"Who says Caroline Baddlesmere?" he asked drowsily.

Emma turned on him :

"*I* say Caroline Baddlesmere," she said. "I say she has written a book—which is more than your worst enemy could say of you, Aubrey."

Aubrey yawned :

"Ah! Book is rather a large word, most blunt Emma. Every schoolgirl prints her literary effusions nowadays. But print and binding do not make a book."

He yawned again.

Rippley raised his eyebrows :

"Aubrey's quite inspired to-night," he said.

The fussy little minor critic, Fosse, jumped into the opportunity for an opinion :

"One cannot but admire the personality of Caroline Baddlesmere," he began.

Rippley winked to the others :

"Shorthand writer, please," he called. "The lips of James Fosse are about to drop pearls."

Fosse flushed impatiently, but held doggedly to his opportunity :

"But her work was bound to die. It lacked the dainty quality of style"—he twiddled fingers in the air, seeking the expression of subtleties too exquisite for translation by the tongue—"that illuminating light that only comes to the virile-minded ; the epigram—finesse—the er—er——"

"Quite so," growled Lovegood gloomily—"quite so, Mr. Fosse. Unlike your genius, the thrills of cachinnation never followed at her heels."

Fosse's fussy eyes looked perplexed :

"N-no, no. Perhaps not. Still—that was not exactly what——"

"Sit down, Fosse!" cried Rippley impatiently. "Let the other ass speak.'

Fosse sat down.

Aubrey drowsily took up the cue :

"Woman," said he languidly—"woman is adorably illogical—deliciously ridiculous—exquisitely attractive ; but woman has no sense of humour——"

Emma Hartroff laughed shrilly :

"Good old Aubrey!" cried she. "I always said that our minor poet was lineally descended from his mother."

"Silence!" Lovegood's bass boomed through the room. "Silence! I will have no one insinuate that our poet's mother was an ass."

Tumblers on tables, and feet on floor, thundered applause.

Aubrey, lying back on the sofa, his arms folded, and his head drooped forward, drowsily opened his eyes:

"I repeat," said he—"Caroline Baddlesmere was simply popular. Popularity is merely a vulgar mood—signifying the commonplace—signifying nothing."

Rippley laughed:

"Well, you are not above trying for it, old man," said he. "And it's a mighty sight easier to be unknown."

Aubrey yawned:

"I seek nothing from popularity," he said.

"Then why do you print yourself?" asked Rippley.

"I am in love with art. . . . I have the perplexing preference for the elements of inspiration rather than for the elements of popularity."

Rippley snorted:

"Oh—go to sleep!" said he.

Aubrey turned to Emma Hartroff apologetically:

"I'm sorry," he murmured drowsily, "but I have been wandering in the meads by running streams all day, and it has only made me sleepy. I had done better to have invented my own facts in Nature—Nature does not select—like the good God, she is most wasteful."

Emma Hartroff jumped to her feet, and strode up and down a turn or so, her hands in her pockets. She came to a halt, and straddling in the middle of the room, she said suddenly:

"D'you know, boys—I *like* Caroline Baddlesmere!"

Lovegood coughed:

"Fame, indeed, for Caroline Baddlesmere," said he.

"Yes." She nodded her head decidedly. "Caroline Baddlesmere's a rippin' good sort."

Lovegood, sitting back in his chair, eyed the straddling figure gloomily from under his dark brows:

"Certificate of character for Caroline Baddlesmere!" he growled.

"Yes." She nodded again. "I'm ding-dong sorry she's struck bad luck; but—y'know—Caroline is a bit of a new woman. . . . Now, *I* like a woman to *be* a woman—and *act* like a woman—and—and—*dress* like a woman!"

There was loud and prolonged laughter, and shouts of satiric applause, and cat-calls.

She herself dressed like a policeman.

Tumblers were banged on the tables.

There were loud cries:

"Good old Emma!"

"Sublime Emma!"

"Gorgeous Emma!"

She bent her brows on her mood, and set her feet more firmly apart.

"Yes," said she—"I like a gentle voice in a woman."

The laughter became hysteric.

Lovegood raised a gloomy eyebrow:

"What's the matter with Caroline Baddlesmere's voice?" he growled.

She turned on him:

"Look here, Eustace; can Caroline Baddlesmere cook?"

"God knows!" he said. "Why should she? The Creator did not make woman in the image of a Dutch oven!"

Emma Hartroff sat down, and uttered a sigh:

"Oh, you're beyond me, Eustace. I don't like you when you're serious." She turned to the others: "Our humorist is as solemn as a pawnbroker," she said.

There were loud cries of "Order! order!"

Rippley stood up:

"Someone *dared* to speak of pawnbrokers!" he said.

Emma Hartroff seized the tails of his coat:

"For heaven's sake, let us have no fines to-night, Rippley—I'm stone-broke——"

She started—gave a shrill scream—and added:

"Gracious, boys! I forgot. I have to knock up some paragraphs for *The Midnight Sun*."

She fumbled in the breast-pocket of her jacket, and lugged out a note-book.

"Bother!" said she; "what shall I write about?"

She licked the pencil, and cudgelled her genius, but nothing came of it.

Rippley looked down upon her contemptuously:

"Blue Stephens! Emma," said he—"you have no imagination. *Brilliant Literary and Artistic Reception at Mr. Pangbutt's!*"

"Right you are!" she bawled. "That'll do, rippin'! . . . Someone dictate, and I'll write"—she looked round—"You, Lovegood! You have the most gorgeous imagination."

Lovegood bowed:

"I cannot agree with him who said that the flattery of woman has no end," he said drily.

"Oh, chuck epigram," she said—"and dictate, like a good chap."

He set his gaze on the theme, and the great black brows met:

"*The select Conversazione in the spacious and brilliantly-lighted rooms—of the—er—world-famous portrait-painter was attended by——*"

Emma Hartroff held up her pencil:

"Easy all!" said she—"*attended—by*——All right. Go on."

Fluffy Reubens took up the dictation:

"*——by the élite of the fashionable world and the flower of Upper Bohemia——*"

Emma Hartroff's pencil scratched down the addition:

"*Upper—Bohemia*," said she.

Lovegood coughed:

"Which idiot is writing this masterpiece, Emma? the fluffsome Reubens or I?"

Fluffy Reubens apologized :

"I was so afraid that élite might be left out," he said.

"I am sorry," said Lovegood sadly, "that so old a friend should think me so barren an artist."

Emma Hartroff looked up :

"Oh, chuck argument," she said impatiently. "Go on, Lovegood !"

She licked her pencil invitingly :

Lovegood entered into his inspiration again :

"*The palatial rooms were resplendent with a hundred lights, and the myriad glass lustres shone like stars above the well-bred Babel assembled in this gorgeous modern palace. Amongst the witty throng mingled eminent men—in the arts and the—er—liberal professions.*" He coughed. "Aubrey represents the liberal professions—though he rarely achieves his larger intentions——"

"Shut up, Lovegood—and dictate," said Emma.

Lovegood sighed, and got back to his task :

"*To say nothing of much beauty and fashion*——"

Emma simpered :

"Flatterer !" she said giddily.

Lovegood bowed :

"*Mr. Fosse, the English Maupassant, was to be seen flitting from group to group, discoursing on the magnetism of style. Mr. Carver Rippley, whose possible election to the Academy was the topic of much speculation, explained away the motive of his coming masterpiece in marble. Mr. Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre*——"

A bottle-necked man with a shapeless head, colourless hair, and a fat puffy underlip beneath a slovenly moustache slowly rose from a chair.

Rippley flung himself upon him, punched him in the midriff, and threw him back into his seat. Rippley's brows were knit :

"For God's sake," said he, frowning at Lovegood—"don't start Quogge Myre talking. He always takes two columns of close print to yield up an idea—and then it isn't his own."

Lovegood chuckled grimly :

"*A most pleasant evening showed Mr. Pangbutt to be not only a man of mark in the fashionable world, but a brilliant and amusing host—his loud, jolly laugh and gay camaraderie setting the keynote of refined amusement to the distinguished party that poured through his palatial rooms.*"

Emma Hartroff looked up—the pencil on her lip :

"Hang it all, you've left *me* out, Lovegood !" she said.

Lovegood smiled :

"I distinctly mentioned beauty and fashion, Emma. But I will give you the personal note : *Miss Hartroff was elegantly dressed in peau-de-suede gloves of the latest colour*——"

Rippley said "Naughty !"

Lovegood coughed :

"*Mr. Aubrey, languidly witty, was the soul of poetry in motion.*"

There was a gentle snore.

Rippley held up a hand, motioning for silence :

"Ts-s-sh!" he hushed; and he added in a whisper: "Poetry sleeps."

Aubrey was heavily asleep in his corner of the sofa; chin on chest, his inert arms fallen listless by his sides.

Lovegood rose from his chair, and said in a low growl:

"Citizens, the republic of letters is again called upon to record its august vote." He pointed tragically to the sleeping beauty: "This weary Affair that lies before you, its lank indecent limbs stretched in such graceless attitude of repose, has once already, during this evening, offended your eyes, insulted your intelligence, galled your ears, with the declaiming of unasked-for verse."

"Intolerable!" growled Rippley; and

"Intolerable!" growled they all.

"Hush!" said Rippley.

Lovegood pointed a scornful hand at the sleeping poet:

"The Thing stood up, stopped conversation, and—uttered indifferent verse!" said he.

They all shook their heads.

Lovegood's pale face glowered upon them:

"Here is a being, old before his time, usurping the wisdom of the world—which were bad enough—but, worse still, offending your sight, as citizen Rippley might say, by affecting the hair of decadence."

Fluffy Reubens coughed:

"Preposterous," growled he—"cut it off."

An angelic smile spread over the pale features of Eustace Lovegood:

"How great thought travels!" he said ecstatically—"how thought begets thought! . . . Now that was precisely what flashed into my thinking machinery. What? Scissors? Oh, ah, yes—materialistic Emma always carries scissors. But the executioner! who is worthy to clip the godlike locks?"

Rippley stole over to Emma and took the scissors.

Lovegood smiled:

"Ah, yes, Rippley! Thy subtle fingers, creating such blood-curdling insignificances in clay, shall at last be used to noble ends—at last be put to their originally designed calling of barber." Rippley was snipping off the hair with unskilful gashes, the severed locks falling softly upon the floor. "Thou, Rippley, shalt make minor poetry illustrious—thou shalt breathe notoriety into the nostrils of Aubrey's verse—thou shalt give him through a success of scandal what his rhymes can never bring him—a grip on the skirts of Fame. Since Fame his verse can never bring him, he shall flirt with her through Infamy."

Rippley held up a lock:

"Anyone else have some?" he asked.

Lovegood chuckled ironically:

"But shear the glory from him tenderly, deftly," said he. "You're not cutting a hedge. Set aside each lock that falls, that the hero-worshipper may wear a snippet from a poet's brow. . . . All the dear delightful barmaids will want a lock. Peckham tea-parties will thrill at the touch of it—Clapham culture sob—West Kensington be troubled. And in the town I can hear all the little coffee-girls a-weeping. . . .

Pan is not dead. The news is worse than that—Pan is growing bald and middle-aged. . . . Poets should be heard, not seen."

Rippley dropped the scissors and whipped into a seat, uttering a smothered guffaw, as Aubrey roused and yawned.

Lovegood sat down :

" Silence," said he—" the sleeping beauty wakes."

The poet opened his eyes drowsily, and rose slowly, sleepily, from the sofa, amidst a tense silence.

As he stood up, his hair raggedly clipped about his head, making his long neck inordinately naked, a titter ran round the guests.

He shivered :

" I dreamed," he said ; and ran his hand over his hair.

' I dreamed——"

He ran his hand over his hair again.

Emma Hartroff got up from her seat and, thrusting her hands into her pockets, she straddled before him, gazing at him.

His eyes were staring blankly into space.

She tittered :

" Well, I'm blowed !" said she—" Modern Poetry seems to be all rhymes and neckties."

The poet burst into tears.

* * * * * *

For a month the boy Noll lay seriously ill ; but at last his young body began to gain vigour, and strength slowly to come back to him.

CHAPTER IX

Wherein Master Oliver is convinced that it is Difficult to play the Man's Part on a Weak Stomach

In a large attic the glow of a stove, that roared of warmth, gave a sense of comfort to the spacious, rambling, rather bare room ; and from its opened iron door the ruddy light of its furnace flared cheerily upon the floor.

Near by sat Caroline Baddlesmere at a small table, where a shaded lamp flung down a golden glory upon the white pages of the printer's proofs she was correcting, reflecting little amber lights that played about her handsome eye-pits and nostrils and mouth and chin.

Along the low walls, almost to where the steep roof met them, books were piled for lack of shelves ; and the largeness of the room and the atmosphere of the books gave the suggestion of a library that was strangely at variance with a small bed in the far end of the large place, where a candle dimly showed the boy Oliver lying amongst his pillows, watching Netherby Gomme and Julia as they whispered their confidences seated on chairs hard by him. The candle's light painted their faces picturesquely against the black hollow of an open doorway that led to a smaller attic which was the Baddlesmeres' sleeping-room. Eyes grown accustomed to this gloom might have seen that a thin line of blue smoke curled upwards from the bed, for Noll was colouring the wedding-present—keeping a sharp look-out lest anyone should see him, and raising a screen of bedclothes with his knees, between himself and detection. . . .

Caroline roused from her work, disturbed by the loud sniff of a shabby little maid-of-all-work who entered the room, a dusting-brush under her arm and a dusting-rag in her hand.

"Please, lidy," said the girl, "may I finish a bit of work by the light of the stove?—I won't be more than four-and-twenty shakes, and I'll be very quiet."

Caroline nodded good-humouredly.

The lank child—she was little more—stooped down by the blaze of warm light that came from the stove's open door, and lugging a battered periodical out of her pocket, smoothed it out and began to read. . . .

"What are you doing, Victoria May Alice?" asked Caroline, after a while, smiling at the calm effrontery of the girl.

Victoria May Alice uttered a loud sniff:

"I was just a-finishing this here chapter, lidy—it's so blamey dark on the landing. I'd got to such a beautiful part—where Sir 'Enery Marjorrybanks is a-telling of the lady's-maid as her eyes is so magical and is just a-seein' of poems in their liquid depths, and all that. . . . It give me a kind of nice hump the way they was a-goin' hon——"

"What are you reading, Victoria May Alice?" Caroline held out her hand. "Let me see it."

The smudgy little maid handed her the periodical:

"It's *Bow Bells*, marm—what that rummy gent brings me—him what they calls Lovegood."

She went and stood beside her chair as Caroline looked at the paper; and with long bony fingers, not very clean, the girl proceeded to do the honours:

"That's the picture of Sir 'Enery a-kissin' of the girl hunder the hoak-tree. She's purtendin' she don't like it. I wonder why they always does that in high-class society. I kissed a 'airdresser once, and it was better than a lobster salad—but (*sniff*) that's neither 'ere nor there. . . . I like them wonderful whiskers of Sir 'Enery Marjorrybanks—I like 'is name, too, it's like crackin' nuts—Marjorrybanks."

"Marchbanks, Victoria!"

Victoria May Alice looked hard at the handsome lady before her, suspiciously:

"Garn, mem!" said she—"you're coddin'."

A smile flickered about the corners of Caroline's mouth:

"No," she said severely—"you must believe me, Victoria."

"Well," said Victoria May Alice—"I'll allow I most generally does. But if that there don't spell Marjorrybanks I'll darn my stockings."

Caroline Baddlesmere nodded:

"Then," said she, "Victoria May Alice will have to darn her stockings."

Victoria May Alice considered:

"No, mem," said she—"I takes back the stockin's. I dessay you're right." She put her head on one side and surveyed the difficulty with one eye half shut. . . . She sighed: "All I can say is that it ain't the way *we* was taught to spell at the board-school. But I suppose it's all right. I reckon it's high-toned and hupper-class to spell things as they ain't got no reason to be spelled. There was a lady here quite recent as was callin' on the first floor as is given to indulgence." She tippled with an imaginary glass of wine. "And this party as was callin' on the one as is given to——"

"Hush, Victoria," said Caroline.

"Yes, *you* know—well, she was a-doin' of the thing regular formal and in style, I can tell you, powdered footman and a red-nosed geezer with white leather breeches a-sittin' on the coachman's box, and all—well, she rings the bell in the old party's room as—*you* know—and in I hustles, a-doin' up my bun on the back of my 'ead with my 'and as I stood at the door. She asked for her broom. 'Yes, lidy,' says I, and takes her one up from the kitchen. But she was that short, you'd

think I'd hit her on the bonnet! . . . What d'you think she was gettin' at? . . . Why—her bloomin' brow-ham!"

Victoria May Alice, in the attitude of a coachman on his box, and with mighty clucks and "gees" and "whoas," whipped up imaginary horses.

A shrill voice called from far below:

"Victoria—May—Yall—liss!"

The little maid-of-all-work went out of the door, and, leaning over the balustrade, she called down the stairs at the top pitch of her shrill voice, standing a-tiptoe to give her lean lungs full play:

"Yes—marm! I'm a-com—ing!"

She came back into the room, and added placidly:

"I 'ate 'er voice. It goes through yer like a gimlet. . . . But (sniff) she ain't bad—not all through—when you knows 'er." She sniffed.

The shrill voice came mounting up the stairs:

"Victoriar—May—Yall—liss!"

The untidy child stepped quickly back to the door, and putting out her head through the cranny, yelled, with sing-song delivery:

"*Yes*—marm!—I'm a-comin'—I'm—a-coming! The top floor's a-wantin' coals hasty, marm; and a-gettin' nasty about the size of the scuttles!"

She came blithely into the room, and, screwing up her mouth, said, with a wise nod of the head:

"That's one on the tender for 'er!"

Caroline suppressed a smile, and said reprovingly:

"I made no complaint about the size of the coal-scuttles, Victoria."

Victoria May Alice sniffed:

"Lor bless yer, no," said she; "but them coal-scuttles is what I calls a vegitable halloocination. . . . You ain't one to complain; but it's about time some one did it for yer. . . . My word, she do run it fine with them egg-cups o' coal! She don't dare let *me* fill the bucket—so I gets off that job!" Sniff.

Caroline sighed:

"Ah, Victoria, she has to practise economy."

Victoria May Alice nodded her head seriously:

"There's some kinds of economy as is religion, and some kinds as is against religion, mem," said she. "She's always talking of savin' for that blackguard son of hers in Australia." She came near to Caroline Baddlesmere and added in a hoarse whisper—"My solemn opinion is the feller is doin' his five years' hard."

"Now, now, Victoria—you are descending to scandal!"

"Perhaps I am—and again, perhaps I ain't. Who'd be writing to her from Wormwood Scrubbs Prison but her own relations—garn! D'yer think——"

"Now, now, Victoria!"

Victoria prepared to depart, but hesitated at the door:

"If Master Oliver's a-wantin' of anythink, lady, jest you put yer 'ead over the rail and 'owl for it," said she. Loud sniff. "It's no good being backward and modest in this 'ouse—nor, for that, in this dirty city. . . . They——"

There was a furious ringing of a bell below, and the racket was followed by an irritable yell :

"Victoria—May—Yall—liss !"

Victoria May Alice sniffed :

"My eye !" said she—"she'll thump my 'ed when I go down !" And yelling where she stood : "Yes—marm—I'm a-coming !" she turned to Caroline and added in a confidential whisper : "No, lidy—it's no gain being backward and modest. *She* don't understand it, bless yer. Thinks you're weak—or can't pay yer bill. And, bless yer, lidy, I don't a-mind a-carryin' up of the scuttles—not to *this* floor."

Caroline nodded anxiously :

"Run along, Victoria, like a good girl."

"Yes, lidy," said she. Loud sniff.

As she turned to go she caught sight of Noll smoking in bed. She smuggled a laugh into her hand :

"The ridic'lous little creature," said she, and disappeared. The door softly shut after her, and her weary young feet could be heard shuffling down the stairs.

"I say, Julia," said Noll, from his bed—"ain't it time we had a meal ?"

Caroline Baddlesmere looked up :

"There's some bread soaked in milk for you, Noll—on the table. I will heat it for you."

The boy's stomach turned against it. He shook his head :

"I'm afraid, mother, I can't eat it," he said. . . . "I'm sorry."

Caroline, rising calmly, put on her cloak and hat and let herself out of the room. She said she would soon be back. . . .

Netherby leaned forward, chin in hand, and gazed at Julia.

"Julia," he said, in a low whisper, "look how these people face poverty and neglect—just because they have each other to work for. Why cannot we, you and I, start life together—now—to-morrow ?"

"But, Netherby——"

He took her slender fingers in his hand :

"My dear girl," said he—"I am now known a little. The money will be coming in soon. What more would you wait for ? . . . Must I bring you the moon ?"

"But supposing I drag you down, Netherby——"

"My dear Julia—you talk as if you were sixteen stone, and I swimming in a duck-pond. We can never be in want from now—not more than we are."

"How can you be sure, Netherby ?"

His stern face smiled :

"I can amuse the world. And the world cheerfully flings its pence to its jesters. On the blackest night the court fool may warm his hands at the hearth of the world. And I once heard the greatest ass in London confess that it takes a clever fellow to be reckoned a remarkable fool in these days, Julia."

"This disaster to Caroline and Mr. Anthony has frightened me," she sighed.

"It has strengthened me," he said—"given me courage. Here are

gently nurtured people, used to the luxuries of life, whose womenfolk wear the bonnet of fashion without a strut, for they have never known any other; here they are, living all hugger-mugger in a "spacious upper floor" where even I, from the ranks, would be everlastingly seeing only the faults—yet never so much as a whimper from them. They are as cheery as though they had come into the family estates. Until the boy went sick, Baddlesmere was never more amusing——"

She sighed:

"Ah, yes—they laugh to keep the tears away," she said.

"But, my Julia, you would not have them live their life in one long-drawn-out fear lest the world be full of fears!"

"But—how do you know your next book will be a success, Netherby?"

"I don't know, dear. I once knew a man who was so afraid of getting a chill that he wore goloshes after sunset—he died of heat-apoplexy."

The boy Noll yawned:

"I say, Netherby," he grumbled from the bed peevishly: "come here, you and Julia, and sit on the bed—I can't hear a word you say—it's so beastly dull seeing you billing and cooing there and missing all the letterpress."

Netherby chuckled hugely; and they both got up, he chuckling, and she blushing, and came to the boy's bedside. Noll was looking very sickly:

"Oh, Noll," said Julia in alarm—"I'm sure you ought not to be smoking. You are looking so pale."

Noll coughed:

"Shush!" said he—"or mother 'll hear you. . . . I got back the pipe from that sailor fellow—I told him I couldn't pay him because I had had money losses. He waived the fee—he said that though he commanded a barge he'd colour a dozen meerschaum pipes for a good un like me, free of cost—I had only to send along the pipes and the tobacco. Such a gentlemanly fellow, he was! Though a bit dirty. . . . Thames sailors are such warm-hearted johnnies—but they don't keep their nails very nice."

"But, Noll," she said—"you ought not to be sitting up in bed without your jacket on."

She brought the lad his short black jacket, and he submitted to putting it on graciously enough.

"Noll," she said—"surely you cannot get any pleasure from smoking?"

"My dear Julia," he said limply—"I shall never get the pipe coloured in time for your wedding if you go on like this. . . . Unless you put it off for a little. . . . You see, I'm not very used to a pipe—and I don't mind telling you it does make my head go round a bit. But—hullo! I say, hold my pipe, Julia—there's a whopping great moth!"

He handed the pipe to Julia, who took it reluctantly enough; he jumped up, and, seizing a butterfly net which hung over a chest of drawers by his bed-head, he leaped about on his tumbled bed in his nightshirt, Eton jacket, and black stockings, making frantic sweeps

at the fluttering moth, which swerved aside, escaped the net, and fluttered through the dark doorway into the next room. Noll leaped from his bed and made after it, in hot pursuit, chasing it into the gloom of the dark room beyond.

Julia sighed—put aside the pipe with dainty fingers of disgust—and sat down again.

They could hear Noll fumbling about in the next room.

Netherby went and sat beside her.

He watched her in silence for awhile :

"Julia," he said—"promise. You must promise. Promise—promise—promise——"

They both started.

Through the open doorway came the boy, looking like misery, deathly pale, and dragging the butterfly-net limply after him.

"O lor!" he said.

"My dear Noll!" said Julia—"what on earth have you been doing now?"

Noll halted wearily before them :

"It's that sailor-man's tobacco," he said gloomily. "It was – too much—for—my strength. I don't think I'm a man—yet. . . . Netherby, you and Julia can get married as soon as you like—I shall never smoke again."

He laid the butterfly-net on Gomme's knees, and added, with a wan smile :

"I say, Netherby, let's change places—you go and catch butterflies whilst I kiss Julia."

Julia jumped and uttered a little scream :

"Oh, Noll, you cruel boy—you've caught the moth!" she cried.

She put her deft fingers into the net, caught the struggling thing, and, taking it out carefully, carried it to the window and let it fly out into the darkness.

Noll smiled gloomily at Netherby :

"It's very cruel of Julia," said he. "It's a beastly night—that moth 'll get an awful cold in its chest—accompanied by sore throat, fever, and chills, and violent perspiration—and developing into a nasty hacking cough."

CHAPTER X

Wherein Master Oliver entertains Guests

WHEN Caroline Baddlesmere returned to the great bare room, and took off her outdoor wraps, Noll was seemingly drowsing, Netherby Gomme sitting on the bed by his side.

The boy had been lying very still for awhile when he touched Netherby's sleeve, signing to him to put down the ear of confidence:

"Netherby," he whispered, "when it's within a quarter of midnight, old Modeyne will be fumbling at the door-latch down below. . . . I shan't be able to help Betty to bring him up to-night—so you might slip down on tip-toe and just keep a flight of steps above her all the way. In case she needs help you can pretend you are just going home."

He took hold of Gomme's coat-lapel:

"Don't let her know you are on the look-out unless old Modeyne is very far gone—he's a goodish weight to push along."

Netherby nodded.

A gleam shot into Noll's eye; and he caught Gomme's coat-lapel again:

"He comes up pretty quiet—he always takes his boots off *for fear of waking the gossips!*" A twinkle glittered in his eyes: "The bother is that once he begins undressing he takes off everything but his shirt, and insists on going to sleep on the hall mat. Betty has got to keep him moving—she knows exactly what to do. . . . Once he starts up the stairs he is all right—unless he hiccups, and insists on apologizing to the people whose doors he is passing. . . . You'll know soon enough, he nearly kicks their doors down. He looks killingly funny with his braces hanging down behind and carrying his boots and things as he goes crawling up the stairs, cracking his toes, and complaining that *it is not seemly that rending Hiccup should climb the Whirling Stairs of Ambition.* He sometimes lies down at the head of a flight of steps and insists on going to sleep—he says that *we are the slaves of convention, and an overplus of cups tends to an overtax of sleep.* . . . You've got to see that he doesn't stop at the landlady's door, or he'll kick it and chuckle in a loud whisper: *Behold where whispering gossip lies!* with the accent on the 'lies.' He's a bit of a wag is old Modeyne; but he won't do anything low—he's always a gentleman — even in his night-shirt." The lad's face grew serious

again. "Betty will be waiting up for him—and she has no fire—and —I shall not be able to help to-night."

Netherby nodded.

There was a knock at the door ; and the little lodging-house drudge crept in, shut it after her, and set her back against it :

"Please, lidy," she said with a loud sniff, "that lidy what walks like a police-officer is a-straddlin' on the mat outside."

She jerked her thumb over her shoulder towards the door behind her :

"I've forgot her name," she went on. "I've showed her up, because it's such a leg-aching grind a-goin' down and up them stairs twice—but I'll show her down again if yer don't want to be bothered with her—and Master Oliver all of a heap too ! . . . I did give her a hint as it was the small-pox likely enough—and I can easy work up the idea——"

The girl was pushed forward by the door opening behind her, and Emma Hartroff entered the room, her hands thrust in the side-pockets of her long jacket.

She greeted Caroline breezily :

"Hullo, Mrs. Baddlesmere—how are you all? . . . I could hear every word the little slavey said. . . . I thought I might come and worry Noll a bit—may I ?"

Caroline had risen, and came forward to greet her.

"Yes, Miss Hartroff—of course you may."

"I'm so glad—I was so afraid they'd send me away."

Caroline, as she shook hands, whispered to her :

"If he show signs of drowsiness, please let him go to sleep."

Emma Hartroff bowed an answer, and strode over to Noll's bed ; she nodded to the others, who made way for her, and taking her straddling stand near him, she surveyed the boy :

"You *do* look pretty sick, on my word, Noll," said she ; and added pathetically : "I wish I could do something for you—I never know what to do with kids ; but——"

"I say, Emma," said Noll—"you ain't going to a children's party, are you ?"

Emma Hartroff raised eyebrows of inquiry :

"N-no, Noll !"

He signed to her to sit down beside him.

"Then don't play the snivelling mother," said he—"it ain't your size. Come and flirt with *me*—you may hold my hand."

Emma Hartroff laughed good-naturedly, and sitting down on the bed beside the boy, she took his hand :

"Noll, you are very old," she said—and she blew a breath : "Phooh ! you *are* high up."

"Yes," he nodded—"it makes me quite giddy when I smoke a pipe."

A knock at the door—and the little drudge skipped in and shut it again. She strode down the room on tip-toe to Caroline :

"Please, lidy—here's that rummy gent as speaks like them beautiful play-actors. He's waitin' to see you very partic'lar." She giggled. "He's such a funny gentleman ! Excuse my laughin', mum, but he is that hodd and ridic'lous ! When I opened the door he says, says he : 'Hail, lugubrious smudgy serving-wench !' says he." She uttered a

sniff, and cocked her head thoughtfully : " I expect he's a poet or that sort of party. Jimmy, what a rum tailor he has ! But if you ask me, mum, he knows how to spell hungry. I knows a man's eyes when he's short of his victuals. I ought ter." Sniff. " I do love the the-ayter. They talks so beautiful—just as if words had meanin' in them. Not a bit like real people——"

" May I ask what the gentleman is doing, meanwhile ?" asked Caroline drily.

The girl leaned forward, and added confidentially behind the back of her hand :

" He's on the mat."

She jerked her thumb at the door.

Caroline shifted uneasily in her chair :

" I wish you would call gentlemen by their names, Victoria May Alice," she said irritably. " Do you mean Mr. Eustace Lovegood ?"

" That's 'im," said Victoria May Alice.

" Then show him in, you stupid child."

The face of Victoria May Alice cleared. She strode theatrically to the door, flung it open like a footman, and, suppressing a spluttered guffaw, announced mock-heroically :

" Mr. Eustace Lovegood !"

Lovegood walked in tragically—halted before Victoria May Alice, and put his hand on her head :

" Victoria May Alice," said he, " you will never do for the Embassy. You do not take the world seriously. When you announce genius you must shout it fearlessly, as though you had thrust a benefit upon the world—not as though you were hurriedly hiding away undarned stockings in a coffee canister."

Victoria May Alice muffled a snigger in her hands and skipped from the room.

Lovegood turned to his hostess :

" Ah, Caroline !" He advanced down the room slowly : " Your devoted slave—Noll's devoted slave ! Ha ! Mr. Gomme, your servant ! Miss Julia ! I am your footstool."

Caroline rose to meet him. She smiled :

" You wished to see me, Eustace !" she asked.

He nodded :

" I came to see if Noll were well," he said.

She made as though she would lead him to the boy's bedside :

" It will do Noll good just to see you," she said.

The big man held her hand :

" Ah, my dear Caroline—I come for my own pleasure, not for his. Noll being ill, the town seems unholy quiet. History is an empty tragedy without its historian—an epic less than doggerel without its poet. And the town, being bereft of Noll, has ceased to be moved with incident. The world is become a dead-house. What an eye a boy has for calamities ! He scents an event in the air. He arrives before the accident. A boy is always thrilled at the sight of a powder-cask——"

" I wish, Eustace, you were not always throwing lighted matches so near the cask."

The great fellow laughed jovially, and kissing her hand, he strode over to the bed where Noll lay, his eyes upon him. The greetings were very cordial. There had always been the alliance of understanding between them.

"Noll," said Lovegood, sitting down on the bed at his feet—"dear boy, I am not well versed in the teething of infants, the lacy mysteries of long-clothes, the cooing garrulities of the cradle, but—I *was* once a *boy*. . . . I remember the emotional moments of boyhood. . . . I have never forgotten my first pork-pie. . . . I would fain have brought you a rare roast goose, Oliver ; but I had to decide on the homely chicken broth."

He turned and called :

"What ho, without !"

"A-coming !" cried, from without, the shrill voice of Victoria May Alice.

The door was flung open, and there entered Victoria, carrying a smoking bowl.

"Victoria May Alice," said Lovegood—"bear the goblet to the king."

Victoria May Alice bore the goblet.

She handed the bowl to Noll—spluttered into a guffaw behind a grimy hand—and hurried from the room.

The big man, sitting at the foot of the bed, smiled.

"God bless you, Oliver," said he—"and get well."

Noll began to sup the fragrant broth with a spoon.

Lovegood got up from the bed—coughed—blew his nose.

Caroline caught his eye, and signed to him. He strode down the room to her.

"Eustace," she said, "I wish you would not spend your money on the boy. You have no right to stint yourself—but—my dear fellow, you touch my heart—and—I cannot scold you."

He stroked her shoulder :

"Tut, tut ! nonsense !" said he, "we must not grow sentimental before we are forty——" He was interrupted by the click of the door, and, looking round, found Victoria May Alice at his elbow. She said to Caroline :

"My heye, mum, we is a-makin' of a night of it !"

Lovegood laughed and strode back to his seat on Noll's bed.

Caroline turned impatiently to the girl :

"Yes, yes, Victoria—what is it ?"

Victoria May Alice sniffed :

"It ain't *it*, mum—it's *them*," she said—"two of them comic gentlemen," she tittered, and pulled herself up behind a grimy hand—"as is always a-hangin' about with the party from the the-ayter." She jerked a thumb at Lovegood. "They're on the 'all doorstep and says is Master Noll at 'ome to partic'lar friends—and I says I'll go and see ; but if they was a-comin' into this blessed house they've got to put out them dirty pipes. It's not nice of them a-callin' on the gentry a-smokin' that muck. I don't like it. These here London people has no manners. They wouldn't do it if they was callin' on a duchess or a bandy-legged bishop, or people as keep a butler. But—they are so

ridic'lous ! Specially that— te-hee !—fluffy gentleman. Blime me— if I don't go on to the the-ayter myself when I'm grown up. I calls that Life——"

She stopped at the clatter of feet on the attic stairs :

"O lor !" she said resignedly—"here they comes, bless 'em !"

Caroline put out her hand and touched the girl's arm :

"Victoria, my dear child, don't be so noisy, please."

"Beg pardon, lidy," the child replied humbly, and with sepulchral hoarseness.

There was a loud knock, and before there was time to answer it, Rippley and Robbins boisterously entered the room.

Noll's greetings were too boyish for whispered talk as they all found seats.

Victoria May Alice winked at Fluffy Reubens.

"*He* ain't dead yet !" said she.

Caroline had scarcely returned to her work, when Victoria May Alice stepped stealthily to her side :

"Mr. Fosse called just before these gentlemen, mum," said she. "The silly hass wouldn't take no for an answer, so I says, 'Well, it's scarlet fever if you will have it between yer bleery bicycle lamps,' says I." She put her lean little arms akimbo : "He's so blimey pushing." She put her hand up to her mouth and added confidentially : "I can't abide Fosse myself——"

A distant yell from below called : "Victoria-May-Yallis !"

"Hullo !" said the girl, "there's 'er voice a-yellin' again."

She stole away softly.

CHAPTER XI

Wherein Egoism begins to Suspect that there is a Bottom to the Pint Pot

"PLEASE, mum," Victoria's untidy head appeared round the edge of the door, whispering hoarsely: "A gentleman as calls hisself Pangbutt is on the hall mat downstairs."

Caroline raised her head inquiringly:

"Mr. Paul Pangbutt?" she asked in frank surprise.

Victoria May Alice nodded violently:

"That's the gent, mum—he said as you'd know his name."

"Say I am not at home to visitors."

"I did, mum—but he says as I was to say as he is partic'lar anxious to see you. He called before—but he was that blimey gloomy I sent him off for a walk—said as you wouldn't be in for an hour—Lord 'elp me."

Caroline hesitated.

"Wait," she said. "Show Mr. Pangbutt upstairs, Victoria."

Victoria May Alice dropped her dust-pan and brush with a rattle of surprise:

"Oh!—you *will* see him. . . . Bless yer, *I* thought he'd be a gloomy nuisance—he's that solemn. I told him he hadn't a charnce. He rather calls for a sunshiny day to show him off, does Pangbutt." She came in and leaned forward toward Caroline: "Don't yer hesitate to say a hint, mum—I'd lie like Sapphira, if yer tips the wink. I was a-putting of him off anyway—I've been a-hinting as you was in your bath, mum, but, of course, if yer *want* to see him, I'll tell him it was all shine and on second thoughts you ain't a-goin' to have one to-day."

The girl went to the head of the stairs, rattled the tin dust-pan against the brush handle to call the visitor's attention down below, and cried shrilly over the balustrade:

"Hi! mister—you can come up all right—it's all off about the bath."

She put her untidy head in at the door:

"He's a-comin' up, lidy," she said; and, shutting the door, departed.

Caroline sighed wearily:

"I wish we could suppress that child," she said. . . .

The door opened and Victoria May Alice, in the gloom beyond the lamp, cried, as a dark figure entered the room :

"The gentleman as says he's Mr. Pangbutt, marm !"

A burst of laughter came from the group about the bed at some passing sally from Noll.

Paul Pangbutt, blinking at the lamplight, looked dazedly round the room.

Caroline rose from her seat :

"Ah, Mr. Pangbutt !"

She bowed to him formally, and added airily :

"So the river of life brings us together again in strange places !"

He came to meet her haltingly :

"I particularly wished to see you—alone," he said in a low tone and with some embarrassment.

She bowed :

"We have drifted along such different ways," she said coldly, "that I could scarcely believe the little servant when she told me so."

"I came to see if I could be of any help," he said, almost in a whisper.

She laughed lightly :

"Help ?"

Her voice rose in gay surprise.

"I heard you needed help," he said, "nearly a month ago."

"Thank you—no. But won't you be seated ?"

He went to the stove and gazed at it—rebuffed—perplexed

Caroline resumed her seat :

"So you are settled in London at last !" she said. "I hear nearly a year now. . . . You see you are quite a celebrity——"

A burst of laughter from the group about the bed made him start—and he glanced suspiciously over his shoulder.

But they were oblivious of him.

"Come, Caroline," he said hoarsely, "you needn't wound me more than my own miserable thoughts have been doing for these many days."

"Then let us have no talk of help," she said, dropping her voice also. "Anthony has got some night-work on the papers at last. We are at the end of the siege. Besides—how do you know I am not on the eve of another masterpiece ?" She laughed—a little sadly. "You mustn't judge me too closely by my gowns—they are a little out of the fashion, beyond a doubt, but we may blossom again next spring."

He drew a chair, a poor rickety piece of furniture, before the stove, and sat down upon it.

She smiled as it struck her how, unconsciously, he had, even in a troubled state of mind, taken the warmest place in the room. He sat for some while, gazing drearily into the furnace.

She wished he would say his say, and let her get back to her work.

At last he spoke in a low voice :

"Ah, Caroline, you and Anthony are the true artists—I only a fair-weather one. . . . I have always dreaded the attic. I never could put aside discomfort. . . . Anthony was quite right—I am painting the most soulless things. . . . They pay."

She felt relieved. Anthony had evidently not gone with his hat in his hand.

"Well—we do not yearn for the attic heights precisely," she said drily.

He let the flippancy pass. He was too interested in himself to trouble about their tastes.

"I am too successful," he said.

She smiled:

"I am not sure it isn't best so," she said—"for you can help the struggling ones to live——"

"Don't stab me with that weapon"—he winced—"it is just exactly what I have forgotten to do." And he added half to himself: "Fame has been my very God."

Loud laughter filled the room.

Noll yawned drowsily at the far end of the attic.

"But how *do* you tickle a trout?" he asked.

Caroline repressed a desire to laugh.

She shrugged her shoulders:

"Ah, Paul—you still worship at the old shrine—Fame, Posterity, and all the Clap-Trap! . . . After all, the ages have their own intellectuals."

"I do not think we should wholly neglect posterity," he said largely. He was deft in throwing the catchpenny. "We ought, if we paint a great picture, to paint it with colours that will not decay."

She smiled sadly, flipped over some proofs, and read:

"*All language dies, giving birth to other. Colour fades—paint perishes, marble crumbles, the statue falls in the grass, the glowing harmonies pass into blackness and are no more, the rains wash the hand's craft from the hardest stone—the cathedral, the masonry of which, splendidly upspringing to the clouds, reaches towards the swinging skies, crumbles at last and falls and sinks into the gutter—is carried grain by grain in drainage of runnels to the water-brook, or by babbling brook in rounded pebbles into the sea of obliterate things. That literary works die, as all human effort dies, is a part of the pathos of the unattainable—a part of the grim tribute of Life to Death. In the life of the world, Homer is but of the day before yesterday, and he is dead except to a few scholars; even Shakespeare himself, who is but of yesterday, is read and known by how few of those who utter so glibly the fragments of his wisdom! There is no finality in literature—no end to art. The sweetest love-lyric will one day sound scholastic, pattered by lips that, for all their essaying, cannot taste its native tenderness—sounded in ears that will be deaf to some subtle accent of it—heard by alien minds that must strain by grammar and rule of thumb to catch its meaning, which the very shepherds of its living day could grasp at its mere uttering. But noble work, even though it pass away, gives birth to nobler, as the heroic act ceases at the breathing of a breath, yet lives in the remembering; and we should be content indeed to enrich and strengthen the spirit of our age.*"

He sat for awhile, after her voice had ceased; and, with puckered brows, stared at the light:

"I have worked only for Fame," he said. "I have shut out the world—turned a deaf ear to its pain and cry—toiled and striven for Fame alone. And I have won it."

"Then you have found a pretty dry biscuit to feed your heart upon," she said.

He nodded:

"I have awaked to find myself alone."

There was laughing applause by the bed.

Caroline smiled sadly:

"So you have been a little lonely, eh, Paul?"

"I am finding myself more and more alone."

There was another gust of laughter from the group about the bed.

Pangbutt looked round uneasily.

The sphinx smile came to Caroline's lips; she saw his uneasiness.

"Paul," she said—"there are too many ghosts in your house."

"Ghosts?" he asked moodily. He nodded after awhile:

"Perhaps there *are* ghosts," he said bitterly.

She leaned forward:

"Yes, Paul—when the twilight comes, and the day's work is set aside, all the colours turn to drab—and the ghosts of dead friendships and dead follies come out and walk."

He uttered a low bitter laugh:

"And yet there are they that are jealous because I am famous."

Laughter burst into the room.

Pangbutt moved uneasily:

"How oddly those men laugh!" he said.

"You are grown suspicious, Paul—they are not even thinking of us. . . . Every nudge at the elbow is not Envy."

Pangbutt sighed, and turned his eyes inwards again towards the man who interested him most:

"I begin to think," said he, "that I have been living in a fools' paradise."

Caroline's eyes hardened:

"There are worse things than a fools' paradise," she said. "The man who lives for himself alone may awake one day to find himself in a mad-house—one with all the other ghosts that flit about his prison—a shadow amongst shadows, seeking shadows."

"A shadow?"

She nodded:

"A shadow, Paul. . . . There is no woman in your life—no child—no care but for self. What does a childless, mateless man know of life? He has not taken up its most initial gifts. He avoids its responsibilities, its risks, its pains, its debt to God and man. Why should he expect, or even hope for, the joys of life? Who can know real delight who shirks the winning—or who shall find happiness that shrinks from sorrows?"

He shrugged his shoulders impatiently:

"Why should I become a part of the crowd?" he asked with contempt.

"You cannot turn your back on your fellows—unless you are to grow an orchard of dead-sea apples," she said.

He sat silent for awhile.

He gazed perplexedly at his ambitions :

"I have made a career—have won its prizes. Until to-night I considered myself an object of envy. . . . I *am* an object of envy."

"Tush !" she said. "Better be a microbe than a loveless man."

She laughed—but at the sight of his wrecked self-esteem falling about his wretched hunched shoulders the laughter left her eyes.

She leaned forward :

"Listen," she said. . . . "As I sat here some days ago, I could have shrieked with terror—lest I should lose my boy. But I would rather go mad with such fear than never have known the possibility of it—than be as you are. . . . And for what? What is this Fame? Who gives it? Who are these demi-gods who award it? . . . They don't even know their own minds for a generation—sometimes not for a year. . . . Supposing this Fame, then, to which you are giving your life, be *nothing* at all !" She laughed sadly. "But we are getting quite serious," she said ; and rising to her feet she put her hand on his stooped shoulders : "Paul," she said—"you are in love with a sad flirt—I should be ungallant, and break off the engagement. A woman could treat you no worse.'

Paul rose, realizing his dismissal :

"Ah, well, Caroline, old friend," said he—"it is very late—I must be going. . . . You make me think of the old days when you kept us all in order in Paris. . . . Good-night ! It is so long since anybody took sufficient interest in me to rate me. . . . Good-night !"

He moved towards the door, saying as he went :

"I must go and sit with my ghosts. . . . They never scold me—are never angry with me, beyond pulling an ugly face now and again—only they are so infernally dull."

She saw him to the door :

"Good-night, Paul !" she said—and added, laughing : "Get you a wife—and learn to play with children."

She shut the door and went back to her task.

"Heigho ! the man has quite forgiven himself for a life full of meannesses," she yawned.

She sat down wearily in her chair by the stove, and as she got out her proofs to correct for the press, she sighed :

"Thank heaven, the last page ! . . . Heigho ! I am weary. . . ."

She sank back in her chair ; and as her eyes closed, her hand upon the last corrected page, she fell fast asleep.

When Caroline awoke in the greying dawn, the small Betty was sitting in a chair near the boy's bed, solemnly reading by the guttering candle. The child had set a kettle to boil ; and teacups and an old brown teapot of the kind that is called toby shone invitingly on the little table whereon the candle feebly struggled against the cold light of the coming day.

Caroline roused, and, walking to the child, she stroked the dainty little head.

Betty rose, fetched the kettle that purred on the stove, and filled the teapot ; and, when she had let it stand for a spell, she drew off a cup of tea.

She looked round.

Caroline was kneeling by the bed of the sleeping boy, her head buried in her arms.

Betty slipped quietly from the room.

CHAPTER XII

Wherein Miss Betty Modeyne wins more Hearts

It was a month or more before the boy was allowed to go into the country ; so that it was early summer by the time they sent him away with Netherby—the small Betty being added to mother the party at the last moment, there having arisen doubts as to the quality of the housekeeping owing to the absent-mindedness of the bear-leader. So for a fortnight there was a happy party at the old inn by Burford Bridge.

Where the Major slept during the fourteen nights was never known ; but city wags to this day aver that it was beside the wine-cooler under the sideboard at *The Cock and Bull* in Fleet Street. There are discrepancies, but the weight of evidence lies near the wine-cooler. . . .

The fresh air of the Surrey uplands soon had the lad Oliver strung to the full pitch of devilment that is nature's questionable gift to boyhood ; and he rapidly regained what Netherby Gomme, with meaning accent, called his " habitual rude health." . . .

Whilst Netherby Gomme filled the morning hours with the winning of bread in his little room at the inn, Noll and Betty loitered by the river and watched the shadowy grey trout lying along the trailing weeds with blunt noses up stream below the stilly waters of the sluggish flood ; or they wandered in the meadows where the high whispering poplars line the margin of the babbling rivulet, their gossip leafage never ceasing the tattling of secrets with the gadding winds amongst the passing rumours of the high heavens ; or they climbed the long green slope of Box Hill up to the swinging sky a-top, until it seemed that they might touch the clouds by mere uplifting of outstretched hands, all England lying like a pleasant garden at their feet ; or, topping the hill, they would clamber down its steep wooded side, and so out upon the road at foot to the little stone bridge, where they would lean over the parapet and watch the enamelled dragon-fly hang quivering above the glassy pond, scintillant in gay attire with all his silver armour on, bedecked in splendour of green and purple jewellery ; or they would flirt pebbles at the shy black water-hen that bobbed up to her quaint swimmings ; and so, strolling round by Dorking town, as the sun topped its

ascent and blazed hottest to its first hour of decline, they would make for their inn, to drag Netherby out of his den for luncheon, and get them into the breezy dining-room that gave on to the grassy garden where the butterflies fluttered amongst the roses, and the lurching flycatchers swooped down upon such of the gadding beauties as were least bitter to their dainty palates, and drowsy bees buzzed at their honey-gathering amongst the fragrant white trumpets of the tobacco-plants, and the fantastic box-trees that hedged their ken danced in the sunny glare that shimmered upwards from the panting earth. And all the careless world was full of balladry.

The mid-day meal done, they would roam out on to the green lawn and sit in the shade, reading some thrilling adventure, or, dragging Netherby with them, break the law and invade the kitchen, where the jolly hostess of the inn would point to the written word above the chimney-place but scarce enforce the law, nay, even dust chairs instead to hold them there ; and the cook would pin a kitchen clout to each of their shoulders to display their shame ; so they would sit and gossip of the little world about them ; and the big-hearted busy woman would discover little stores of hardbake and shortbread and suchlike delightful evils for young stomachs, for she had a soft heart and was fond of her joke—and Netherby came out ridiculously well on such occasions, and the others were not wholly demure. The gay banter would go a-tossing.

Or they would wander round to the stables to call upon their friend Sim Crittenden—the prize-fighting ostler with the gentle eyes and the temper that nought might ruffle and a singing voice like a baritone god—who, leaning on the long wooden handle of his pitchfork, his shirt-sleeves rolled up, and his braces hanging looped against his breeches' flanks, would stand at the end of the stables and sing to them songs from Handel and the masters—*Ruddier than the Cherry* and *Toreador* and *Nazareth*, even descending, with apologies, occasionally to *It's a Great Big Shame* or other latest music-hall lilt.

Netherby, who began to fear a too poetic pastoral atmosphere at the inn, was to have satisfaction in the life of action that he adored, and a lively descent to vigorous prose.

The hard-hitting ostler was to strike the dramatic note.

Adventure came with the rougher element that rattled down in hired carriages to the inn, chi-hiking and using squalid language along the highroad on their week-end outing from London city. Cockney youth, with fantastic picturesque tendencies as to dress, and crude love in the wagonettes, descended to the ground, alighting before the inn, and swarmed into the drinking-bar, thirsty with the swallowing of dust and much shouting, buxom beauty hanging upon their arms with proud gaze boldly cast upon their noisy lords from under the heavy hair that shaded their frankly vulgar eyes, and with ear-racking laughings from their full red lips to greet all their swaggering gentlemen's uttermost ribaldries.

Inflamed by beauty, cockney youth was on the strut, well-inclined to debauch ; and much beer did the rest.

They made the inn a riot of vulgarity.

Yet, all had gone well till twilight, and had as likely enough gone well to the hour of their home-going—and they were already foregathering in the tap-room for the drinking of the last glass—had it not been for the garrulous and boastful habit of the gardener of the inn, a red-bearded fellow of weak knees and splay feet, who got to bragging about the inn's ostler. However, a cockney youth, a clean-limbed, quick-eyed cub, being grown something tongue-loosed by reason of the beer, at once brought out his conceit and paraded it—it also had to do with some little parochial honour in which he was held with regard to the skilful use of his naked hands—he had made some tough fellow's nose bleed or arrived at the like godlike achievement. He thought himself a match, he said, for any fellow that messed about horses. This with prodigious blasphemies. Whereat the red-bearded gardener laughed loudly ; and the cockney youth, fired with wrath, hit at the centre of the laugh, and missing the gardener's mouth, the which was no such difficult job for the tangled thicket of red hair about the laugh, got his clumsy knuckles somewhere in the region of the gardener's nose and set the blood flowing.

The barman called for order, and the cockney youth, forgetting the impiety of mishandling the authority of the chair, got his five fingers into the potman's neck-cloth.

Then it was seen that Sim Crittenden, the ostler, stopping in the midst of the deep note of *Nazareth*, walked blithely out of the stables on light springy feet, passed along the highroad before the inn, and swung open the outer door of the drinking-bar.

He stood before them that brawled in the tavern and grimly eyed the riot.

"Who undid the potman's necktie ?" he asked in a deep growl.

The cockney youth turned and put out his chin. He said he didn't give a ruddy geranium who did it, but he was sober enough to take the whole responsibility of the humours of his particular wagonette on his own naked shoulders. He personally detested the potman's taste in ties.

The ostler knocked him down.

The cockney youth got up again and lashed out with his hands —London breeds courage when it is not cowardice, to the full pitch ; every cockney is a potential hero when he is not a whining thief—he was knocked down again.

He scrambled up, and began to feel about dazedly for the ostler's face, but was grown vague as to the object of his hate.

The ostler put down his hands and said that the other might now walk out into the lane with the honours of war if he so willed it ; and he added that he hoped he would go out like a gentleman, as he, the ostler, had a deep-seated distaste to making a mess of the bar with anyone from London. He opened the door for him with the polish of a courtier.

The cockney youth honestly thought of a dignified exit, but beauty nudged at his elbow and whispered a mean design that he should kick the ostler in the waistcoat.

He made the effort to this base end ; was parried ; and forthwith kicked for his iniquity through the door into the road, receiving a violent blow under the ear as he went.

They all rose up and rushed at the ostler. But they went to their undoing. There was no refuge in retreat, no backing into the room from the smite of the great hands, for the red-bearded gardener assailed from behind—he had a heavy foot. One by one they joined him who stood in the dusk on the King's highway. And the road was strewn with their hats.

The ostler came to the doorstep and touched his forelock :

" Shall I put in the horses, gentlemen ?" said he.

They gathered together in the grey of the twilight muttering mean vengeance, but the cockney youth who had brought them to it said commandingly, " Chuck it !" which being interpreted meant that the vulgarities were at an end.

He went up and held out a hand to the ostler :

" I know a better man than me," said he—" when he hits me hard enough ; and you ain't the one I'd choose to slap my face. Hold out your olive-branch."

The ostler held out a great paw and they shook hands ; the ostler's grip, said the cockney youth, made his teeth ache.

The gardener strolled about and restored the scattered hats.

The ostler stood in the twilight and smiled.

The sulky fellows put aside evil desire and came and gripped the great hand that made their knuckles creak.

Then he sang them old-world *Ruddier than the Cherry* whilst their women led their cockney loves aside to the dark shadows under the trees and furtively comforted them.

It all struck the small Betty that it was an indecent sight. Yet there was a thrill of contentment in her heart that it should have fallen to the man who could sing *Nazareth* like a god to do the blood-letting.

On the days when it rained, the little party, Betty and Noll and Netherby, would sit in the small parlour of the inn where Nelson and his Emma had spent those pitiful hours many years ago, the night before the great Admiral posted to the sea-coast to hoist his flag aboard the *Victory*, being at the beginning of that journey that ended in his splendid death at the triumph of Trafalgar—his frail Emma going from the little room, a broken woman, to Neglect, and Worse. . . .

So the happy days went by, until the hour struck for departure. The good hostess kissed Betty on the doorstep, the dainty little lady being dressed for travel—and had to go indoors for the tears that would run, fleeing from the distress of further good-byes.

The glorious sun found them at last, with their pathetically small packages, at the little railway-station, the prize-fighting ostler carrying Miss Betty's little bag, and hovering about the

party, a drag at the corners of his mouth. He was sadly lacking as to his wonted tuneful gaiety.

As the train came in he found an empty carriage for them.

Betty, stepping forward, held out a dainty hand.

The ostler took it, and, stooping down, stroked it between his mighty palms :

" Look ye here, Miss Betty," said he—" you'll be a great lady some day—I haven't been chucked out of a markiss's stables without spottin' the breed when I see it—but it may likely enough take some nasty days getting there. . . . Now, missee, if you ever wants anythink in my line of business," he added significantly, " this address will always find me—it's where my old mother lives. And if so be that you ever wants physical assistance, jest you go to the nearest telegraph-office. You've only got to say the word, and wheresoever it be in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland or the parts lying adjacent thereto, Sim Crittenden will spoil the handsomest face the Lord ever made—so help me God !"

He took off his hat and held it in his hand, and they each in turn shook his great fist.

He blew his nose strenuously as the train moved out of the station, Betty, where she sat in the window, biting her handkerchief, the tears streaming down the child's face.

The prize-fighting ostler sang no song for several days.

CHAPTER XIII

Which contains Some Hints towards the Making of a Baronet

A DOOR opened, and the echoing tramp of feet on the carpetless boards of the corridor outside ushered the entrance of two men into a large room, wholly devoid of furnishment—the plaster of its walls as bare as its ceiling and floor.

The short, stout, red-faced man shut the door with a slam that resounded through the empty place, thrust his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and said with pride :

" Now, sir ; how do you call that for a stoodio !"

In the fading daylight the younger man, dandified, self-possessed, deliberate, dressed in the severest high fashion of the day, stepped to the end of the great empty place and surveyed it calmly :

" Ah, Mr. Malahide—it is the sort of room I should delight to furnish as I liked—and then live in it," he said ; and he sighed : " I have the palatial instincts."

He spoke with a charm of accent and of manner that drew the frank admiration of the vulgar other ; indeed, the stout Mr. Malahide was looking at a handsome young Englishman in all the first graceful vigour of early manhood—for Bartholomew Doome's lithe slender build gave him an easy carriage of the body that told of well-knit strength, and put aside the hint of effeminacy suggested by the great beauty of the head. As the stout man had said to his wife this very morning : " You could find it in your heart to stroke him down with yer 'and, like a dam race-'orse."

Mr. Malahide pushed his silk hat back upon his florid head and looked thereby even more vulgar than his Maker had intended him :

" Well," said he—" ye like it, eh, sir?"

The smile still flickered about Bartholomew Doome's lips :

" May I ask, Mr. Malahide," he said drily—" what I am doing here ?"

The fat little man kicked out his legs :

" That's just it, sir," said he—" that's just it. Well, you see, it's this way. Now, Mr. Doome, I'm a pretty good-hearted, but rather damn vulgar man——"

He waited patiently for an answer.

Doome looked at him steadily :

" Yes," said he—" by the splendour of God, you are."

" Good. Now, sir, I've made my bit of money in the house-furniture business already ; but Tankerton Wollup he's at the top ; and he's dead sure to become a bloomin' baronet ; and he's as vulgar as I am."

He paused, eyeing the floor at his feet, meditatively.

Doome nodded :

" I will only interrupt you to question the accuracy of your statements, Mr. Malahide," he said grimly.

Pompey Malahide laughed :

" Good," said he. " Well, where Tankerton Wollup can climb, Pompey Malahide can get his boots—and he's going to—though Wollup's father did have the business shrewdness to christen him Tankerton—if you can call it christening in Wardour Street. . . . Tankerton Wollup ! Mine called me Pompey ! but, bless him, the old man's only fault was his sentiment. Pompey ! Why, Tankerton's a name to conjure with ! Who'd suspect that his christian name was Isaac ? And if yer had seen the dirty hole in the city where he began and—— But, steady, Pompey, my boy—we mustn't rake up the manufacture of antique things. Besides, luck has been with him all through—he is even a *red* Jew. . . . However, sir, you have brought to my shops of late more than one tip-top swell that bought the real old stuff ; and I don't mind tellin' you that that's the side of my business I intend to develop. . . . Wollup and me began life by debauching public taste—and he's chucking it—and it's time I did. . . . I want to meet my God like a man——"

Doome coughed :

" I thought it was as a baronet," he said.

The dealer laughed loud and long :

" God ! what a wit you have ! Now, sir, don't you hit me on the neck. . . . Well, I've got clear enough eyes to discover that *you* know the good stuff when you see it at sales, just by the good taste that's born in you. Now, it's no manner o' use putting that good stuff in *my* windows—the people that furnish their houses slap through from my shops don't know the good stuff when they see it ; and, I'll be honest with you, sir, I'll be damned if *I* do—and my partner, that did, died last Saturday. You see, sir, the fact is I'm in a hole. I know good stuff if it's been the fashion long enough—but I have not the knowledge to *set* the fashion. *You* have, but you can't for want of means ; whilst I want to and have the means. I hope I'm not talkin' like a bleating cad," he said.

Bartholomew Doome watched the fat, downright little dealer out of languid eyes ; but his alert mind followed every hint. And he had, besides, a very soft corner in his heart for the man. But he said not a word.

" Now, Mr. Doome, I like you—though they do say you are the wickedest man in London——"

Bartholomew Doome flushed with pleasure—he was easily flattered by genuine praise.

"Oh! Mr. Malahide!" he protested.

"Yes," said the fat important little man, "I like you."

Bartholomew Doome bowed. The dealer put out a hand.

"Don't you sneer, Mr. Doome. A man can't give more than he's got—and liking's the biggest thing he's got—to bestow."

Bartholomew Doome smiled:

"You will know when I sneer, Mr. Malahide—I do not feel like it yet," he said.

"No; well, I'm glad of that, sir. . . . Because—I'm going to ask you if you'll accept an offer. You can but refuse it, when all's said—and break my heart. . . . I wouldn't dare to make it, but I'm a shrewd business man, and I've hunted up one or two young fellows I've seen about with you, and asked them how you lived—and it has emboldened me——"

"One moment, Mr. Malahide. I will ask you no names, but—may I ask how my friends solved the problem?"

The fat dealer laughed embarrassedly:

"They said they were damned if they knew."

Doome smiled:

"Yes," said he—"that sounds like my friends. . . . And the fact is I scarcely know myself."

The dealer nodded:

"Well, sir; what I propose is this: I am not fool enough to think you will turn shopman—it would ruffle you to death—and you'd make a poor one when you did it—your university career has spoilt you for success in business. But if you'll drop in casually when I ring you up—there's a telephone in the next room—and give me an opinion whenever I want it; and if you'll let me furnish this room as your studio with anything you like, just for an advertisement for me amongst your swell friends and the newspapers—if you'll give me the benefit of your good taste and advice on my better-class furnishing business—I only ask for your mornings—I'll give you a thousand pound a year for it."

He peered anxiously at the smart young fellow before him, and added hoarsely:

"For God's sake don't say No. There's my hand on it—or you can take time to think it out if you like."

He held out a fat jolly vulgar hand.

Bartholomew Doome grasped the hand:

"I'll do it," he said. "And I don't mind telling you, Mr. Malahide, I'll be glad to do it."

"Right-o!" bawled the fat little dealer, his red face perspiring with glee as he walked briskly up and down rubbing his hands in his relief. "By Rupert, I'm born to luck. Got *that* beastly job over. . . . Well, sir, the day after to-morrow you are free of all my shops, or anywhere you like to pick things up; and just you order what you wish for this room—there's a couple of rather nice little rooms off it, and a jolly little hall—do it all regardless of cost. And—oh yes—— Now look here, Mr. Doome, to-day I

cast the die. I'm straight off to give orders to compete for a big hotel."

He came close to Doome and whispered as though he feared the very walls might hear. Doome listened closely.

The fat little man stood back a pace :

" Eh ? Pretty strenuous idea, that ! . . . Ye see, Wollup he did the one just opposite. . . . Now, I don't mind even dropping a bit of money over it. Can you go over Wollup's upholstery debauch to-morrow morning, then meet me opposite after lunch, and just give me tips to lick Wollup off his bunyanny feet ?"

Doome nodded.

" Good !" said the beaming Pompey. " My manager will be at my elbow making notes. Don't take no notice of him. Just you plan the hotel like a lady's boodywar, in good colour and telling style—the sort o' thing that pleases the eye so you want to kiss it. Make it *sing*—like a ruddy violin. It's got to put me in front of Tankerton Wollup. See ? Just come in, sir, as if you had a mortgage on the place—don't mind me—and—well, it'll be a bit of All-Right-O ! See ? . . . Oh," he added, growing suddenly serious—" look here, Mr. Doome—you see—my boy's at Harrow, so he's all safe from me, bless the lad ; but—my girls are springing up—rising sixteen one of 'em—and—they are fine stylish girls, too—but—sometimes—I have my qualms that I rub them on the raw a bit. Now, you might give me a hint—now and again—if I—well—*you* know ! Just say : Malahide, my boy, you're on the vulgar side, see ?"

" Off side, eh ?"

" That's it."

Doome laughed :

" You'll be a baronet yet," said he.

CHAPTER XIV

Which has to do with the Fascination of Naughtiness

Doome's studio became the talk of the town.

Who, that is Who, has not sat therein?

It came to be a part of the great Social Function to have the entrance to this handsome room.

The rich tapestries that hung the walls, the glowing colour and the beauty of the furnishments were held in restraint by the chastening, somewhat religious, atmosphere that made the whisper of wickedness add such a mysterious charm to his habitation as it did to the attraction of the dark-souled mysterious Doome himself. No one knew a single vice against the slender handsome youth of the pale classic features and the black hair and immaculate dress; but it was said that things were said. And he was too charmingly delightful—and just a little alarming. Thus gossip wagged an artful tongue.

Dingy-looking weak-eyed journalists of the inferior press sneered in unsigned paragraphs of rancid English at his effeminacy, hinting at unmentionable sins—who, had he struck them, would have thought a horse had kicked them—he, whose only agony was that they should belittle him with their praise. Rude sporting men, that passed their virile lives gazing at horses galloping, said he wanted kicking. None kicked him.

Perhaps the great church candlesticks that rose in massive wrought brass from the dark stained floor at the ends and by the sides of the large room, holding aloft enormous candles half way to the high ceiling, struck the religious note. Or it may have been the exquisitely rich image of the Mary which stood on the mantel amongst the glowing splendid nudes. But the yawning accents of the most garrulous society babbler sank to a whisper on entrance. Nay, the most brilliant rakes had been known to lower their strutting voices on coming into this room. The faculty of reverence lies dormant in the cynic as in the fool.

Nobody had been known to see Doome at work. It was said that some beautiful women could have said things, an they would. But they would not. Yet his exquisite craftsmanship, the wondrous musical rhythm of his line and the quaint and rather morbid fancy of the subjects that came from his pen,

together with a certain uncanniness of imagination, continued to pour forth masterpieces in black and white, startling the world of art and delighting the lovers of his genius.

It was significantly whispered that he never worked except at dead of night, with the great candles lit, and all the old-world glass lustres that hung from the ceiling aglow with a hundred lights ; it was then, said the traffickers in scandal, he came out to the practice of his art in a silken dressing-gown—the most beautiful woman of London sitting to him to snatch a little of immortality.

The scandal grew.

Society wrangled for him.

" Lord of Furnishments " (writes Bartholomew Doome about this time, the summer being at wane, to Mr. Pompey Malahide)— " the air of this city of London is stifling me ; the very sins of the town are grown banal, commonplace. I must to Paris. I leave no address for three months ; but a telegram to the Hotel Albe will be seen within three days. The town is grown an empty caldron —you yourself had best get away with your lovely daughters to some gayer city of fresh air and to change of cheerful small vices and reflecting shop-windows. . . . But you will go, whether I advise or not. Meanwhile I am letting the studio to the Honourable Ponsonby Ffolliott, only son and heir to Lord Wyntwarde of Cavil, until the twenty-seventh of September. It will take three full days to rid it of the multifarious scents upon him, and to lay the echoes of his yaw. . . . Can I procure you fal-lals of price for Miss Mary, or adornments to mar the beauty of Miss Judith ? Tush ! I speak cant. It is all nonsense about painting the rose. Why do beautiful women wear clothes if so ? And what a noise would be in Fleet Street, if the roses came out wholly without adornment ! Fancy thyself, Lord of Furnishments, blushing like peony, taking thy Johnsonian walks abroad, unbedecked and unadorned—not, as now, almost wholly hidden ! Thou wouldst be fantastically wonderful indeed, who art never wholly devoid of fantasy. The ladies might come out better ; but naughtiness would the more shamefully abound. Personally, I am not against the rose ; but the gods have ordered the painting. So be it paint.

I think you have galled the emotions of the egregious rival. I passed Tankerton Wollup on the Embankment meditating on the sea-gulls and the factories beyond, alone with nature who was never given to contemplate the works of nature. It is full time you joined the Primrose League, captured a seat in the Commons, and rubbed elbows with the nobility—when Tankerton Wollup has headache by reason of your greatness. I see, too, in visions, Miss Judith with a coronet atop her pretty brows. But mark the law—rub elbows only with the old nobility—the new aristocracy is so very exclusive. Have an eye to subtleties ; and thy translation is sure.

But should the gods burst the casket of their very uttermost

honours at your feet, and fill your broad lap with treasure, you will never be greater than you are.

Yours, mightily beholden,

BARTHOLOMEW DOOME.

P.S.—The sting is ever in the tail. Nature herself hath so ordered it. I ought to tell you that this Ponsonby Ffolliott thinks he can paint. Gods of little Egypt, it is all very dreadful —makes the teeth ache—but he is well satisfied. What more can heaven send? But the point of the tail is this: . . . He took to the arts, *patronized* them, but six weeks ago. He had drawn 'funny pictures' as somewhat ignoble school-boy at Harrow, it is true; but it was the study of the nude model that finished the business—'twas beauty unadorned, lacking even as to fig-leaf, attracted our recruit. He fell into someone's studio, a model sitting at the time, and the great idea was bred—within the winking of an eyelid—leaped, hissing hot, from the intellectual furnace.

There is already a more than ugly story going about that has to do with this blood ass of Balaam coupled with that pretty little ethereal woman who sat for me a while ago. I suppose one must believe women capable of any enormity in these days. And these youths sin such dirty mean sins—even sin has lost the grand manner.

And the tools of his craft! Such an ordering of the Latest Thing! I was present—a silent witness. My poor easel for the making of the mere black-and-white art is well put away in hiding, or had cracked of envy in such splendid company. No expense spared.

Yet he has his patiences. Rubs out more than he puts in. Is indeed a master of much bread-crumbs. He has the catch-words, too—is for Art for Art's sake, contemns Story, shrugs at the Anecdote, sneers at the Soul, purrs of Values, insists that the Picture shall Keep Within the Frame, rattles all the jargons, and shows a fine contempt for Sargent and all the modern men—yet has almost decided that Whistler *may* live—holds, however, that great Art died with the Renaissance; is not quite sure what the Renaissance was—or where—or when. He chats as glibly as the rest now—hee-haws against the hee-haws of Quogge Myre—and not always in vain. Indeed there are degrees in asininity, when splendour of hee-hawing out-brays the lesser hee-haw. And, Beelzebub! such knees as are on him!"

CHAPTER XV

Which tells of a Poet that offered Himself for Sacrifice, and was Rejected of the Gods

The last day of September has early bridal with the night. Though the afternoon was not full spent, the dark shadows of the coming darkness held the town. In the midst of the gloom that was in Doome's studio stood the sulky figure of the Honourable Ponsonby Wattles Ffolliott ; and, at his feet, there crouched on the floor a very young and very beautiful woman, and her head was bowed. Wringing her clasped hands upon her knees she said hoarsely :

" God have mercy upon me—for this is an awful caricature of His image. . . . I am lost—lost."

He fidgeted peevishly :

" You know, my dear girl, this is most annoying," said he, with self-pitying drawl—" your taunts are in such bad taste—and it is so absolutely embarrassing. And—I so positively detest being embarrassed."

She rose to her feet wearily :

" Ponsonby, all my things are packed, ready to go—Heaven knows there was not so much to pack—it is not that. I do not want to encumber you—to embarrass you. I am going. This place is not such a bewitching Paradise, nor its memories so sweet, that I should stay. I know your time at these rooms is up. But you—even you—must surely realize that I cannot go home where a harsh and bitterly religious step-father sits at the table." She drooped her head : " I could not disguise my state for a day. And they are so religious."

She fidgeted her fingers pathetically :

" No," she moaned—" I cannot go home—there's no smallest mercy in them."

The Honourable Ponsonby broke into her mood :

" But—I say, my dear gal——"

How she had grown to hate the dreadful drawl !

" Ponsonby "—she grasped his arm feverishly, trying to rouse some honour in him—" I have no money—none. I shall soon be a mother. You have made it impossible for me to make money in the studios. At home," she laughed sadly, " they

think I am studying art." She got a-brooding. "The child will require care. . . . Where, in God's name, am I to go?"

"Well—er—I don't really know. You see I'm so bad at arranging things. . . . Almost an ass in some things——"

She touched his sleeve—so pathetically:

"Let the child be born in honour—a secret marriage—anything." She shrank back. "It is dreadful to think of being tied to you," she moaned, "but—for the child's sake—for the child's sake you must be made to remember your promises—you *must* give the child honour."

She saw his inane mouth opening to the uttering of foolishness.

She dropped at his feet, bowing her head to her shame, a wounded broken woman—this little more than child—soon to be the mother of a child.

He fidgeted:

"Well, you see, my dear girl—it can't be marriage," he drawled, "because I'm—er—morally married already—I'm almost engaged—and you know—as a gentleman——"

She brushed her hand back over her forehead. The enormity of his idiotcy stung her, and she groaned:

"My God!" said she—"what a bleating fool this is!"

"Oh yes, call me ridiculous names," he complained huffily—"but I'm really glad to see that you realize that—er—as a gentleman——"

She rose from the floor, and turned upon him:

"Then why, in the name of all's that abominable, did you do this thing?"

He licked his lips sullenly, flinching a little before her:

"Well, don't you see—I knew you would see reason, that you would see that it can't possibly be marriage. And as to providing for you, don't you see I have so precious little for myself—and I have such awfully expensive tastes——"

"God!" she growled, stepping to him, with a sudden urging to strike him—"I could kill you." And she added hoarsely: "I almost think I will."

"Now, don't be violent—I never know what to do when a woman is violent. In my family the women are never violent. . . . You see, Polly——"

"Don't befoul my name by speaking it——"

He shrugged his shoulders:

"My *dear* girl, this melodramatic way of life is most repulsive to me—it makes me feel quite nervous and ill," he added plaintively. "You used to be such a nice girl."

She burst into laughter, miserable laughter, and wrung her hands:

"My God, this is awful!" she said.

She fell a-brooding.

The long silence made the youth uneasy:

"Polly, don't you see——"

"Urgh!" She swung round upon him savagely—growling as a leopard might: "Stop that awful bleating. Your voice turns

my blood acid—is like some filthy stench to me. . . . If you value your life, keep that dreadful voice still. . . . Let me think. In God's name, let me think. . . . What to do ? *that's* the bewildering thing. You, who make me stand a-wonder how I suffered myself to let you touch me—you, with your dreadful idiot's stare and slack mouth (Mother of God, I too must be a living idiot !)—you have robbed me for months to come even of benefiting by the basest traffic in which a woman may barter herself."

Of a sudden she turned to the door :

"Go," she said hoarsely—"go away—or I shall do you an injury. Quick ! I can descend to no more foul shame than I have now known. Go—and, as you love yourself, I say, don't let me hear that awful bleat again."

He walked out of the room in his weak-kneed way, huffily, and was gone.

She stood listening there, until all echo of him, dandified, weak-kneed, had passed out of her ears.

And when the world was become wholly silent, the tense mood passed. She sank to the seat of the sofa and bent her brows on the problem, what to do ? Before her was blackness. No writing across the sullen sky.

As she sat thus in the gloom, scowling at cruelty, a key turned in the lock outside, there was the loud slam of the outer door, a heavy step or so, and a man's figure entered into the dusk of the room.

"Eustace Lovegood !" she said hoarsely. "The good God must have sent you."

The big man started ; took off his hat :

"Bless my soul, Miss Whiffels, *you* here ! Mr. Doome has asked me to use his rooms—for a month. . . . But I did not know there was anyone—I mean, he—must have forgotten."

"No," she said—"I have no business here—none. Eustace, I am a desperate woman. I don't know—where—to go."

"My dear lady !"

"Why should I show a modesty that I once had—a long while ago—quite some months now——"

"My dear good——"

"Listen, Eustace. I must state the indecent thing to somebody. This man has debauched me—body and soul——"

"Good God ! Bartholomew Doome ?"

"No, no. This Ffolliott person——"

"Ffolliott ?" His surprise was unmitigated.

She laughed bitterly :

"Yes—that is the worst part of my shame. It bleats in my ears just like that."

"But——"

"Listen. He will not keep his bond—I cannot appeal to any sense of honour. He himself does not know how to spell the word."

"What! you are not married to him?"

She smiled grimly:

"No. My degradation has not sunk to that. He has not even the will nor the desire to support me even for a little while—until the child is born."

The big man frowned:

"Oh, I do not think he is quite such an unmitigated cad as that!"

She rose from the sofa wearily and went to the fireplace:

"I should like some smallest proof," she said—"for This is the father of—my—child. . . . Give me some smallest proof, Eustace, that this man has a shred of manhood—the least little frayed shred. I have made every appeal—appeals for enslavement which, if granted, would have bitten into me like the teeth of a dog. But, for the child's sake, I held out my hand to be bitten, bared my breast, begged him to befoul me with his benefits!"

She uttered a little harsh laugh:

"I was saved the dog's teeth of that ignominy," she said.

Lovegood had stood, pondering hard; he suddenly remembered a five-pound note which had been paid to him that day.

He coughed:

"Well, as it happens, he has given me rather an embarrassing task to fulfil," he said. "He sends you some money by me—I wish my friends would not always give me their unpleasant duties to perform."

The big man tugged the crisp bank-note out of his breast-pocket, and brought it to her.

She took it; and crumpled it in her hand:

"I will touch nothing," she began passionately, swinging her hand to fling the money into the fire—stopped—turned sharply and looked keenly at Lovegood:

"Oh, Eustace—it's clean after all! What a sweet big-hearted liar you are!"

She went up to him, pulled down his great head, and kissed him on the cheek.

"My God!" said she—"you make me sane. . . . But you are a wretched poor hand at any deceit. . . . A poorer evil-doer surely was never born. . . . But, as a matter of fact, the very heavens are against you this time—the bleating awful Thing has only just left the place."

"Yes, God forgive me, I saw him. He smelt of Poudre d'Amour to the Haymarket."

He led her to the sofa, sat down beside her, and took her hand:

"Don't let us pollute the air with him any more," he said—"let us talk about pleasant things—like *you*."

The girl was becoming quieted.

"Yes," she said—"I must try and keep myself from horrors—for the sake of the little one. . . . Eustace, I believe you have something of the woman in your big heart—and, thank God, you have come to me—for this man has made it impossible for me to

talk to women. . . . So I have had to buy a book. It told me all about the influences upon the unborn child. . . . I must get the memory of this man out of my mind—cleanse my ears of him. You must come and see me and keep me from thinking—the blood that ought to be leaping for delight of this little one was being turned to poison—and, now, since big awkward you came into this twilight, I am almost glad the little one is coming."

The big man, elbow on knee, leaned his chin on his knuckles and looked at her :

"Miss Polly," said he—"I see a better way out. Suppose you let me father the child ! You might do worse. I am a lonely man."

She shook her head sadly :

"There is no such good in store for me," she said.

She took his face between her two slender hands and kissed him —on the brows and cheek and lips and chin :

"I wonder how it is that no woman has loved you, Eustace. . . . It will come."

Her eyes filled with tears.

He could not trust himself to speak.

She sighed sadly :

"One day you will know why I say No," she said "You will know that I loved you too well."

"I think," said he—"I think I know now."

CHAPTER XVI

Which hints at an Age of Gold

Increasing good fortune came with sundry little successes ; and gradually the pressure of want was eased, and the attic became a place of comfort and small luxuries.

Caroline Baddlesmere realized that for the boy the ordinary public school life was not only beyond her means, but that it would now be a sheer waste of time. She therefore, foreseeing that thereby as many good mid-day meals would be assured to the big man under witness of her own eyes, and the small fee helpful to him besides, induced Eustace Lovegood to furbish his mathematics and give the boy a couple of hours of them four or five mornings of the week ; and Betty, taking the big man's hand at the conference, shyly slid into the arrangement.

Lovegood's affection for the boy and girl gave him complete command of their attention ; and his large scrupulousness, wide humanity, and great-heartedness had an even mightier educational force upon them both than the clear wits he brought to bear in luring them along the gritty path of the dry philosophy of numbers. In his hands geography and geology became a romance—an education in themselves ; and science a glittering enchantment. He directed their reading in literature and history and government and statesmanship and social laws, which he put before all else for the training of the good citizen. Indeed he had only to guide—for they were greedy readers. He laid the classics at their feet, making them read good translations first, giving them a clear idea of the author's relation to the times in which he wrote, and persuading the youngsters, after the mathematics were done in the morning, to run through some pages of the Latin or the Greek with him " to keep up the tune."

The boy's wits awoke at once, roused as they had never been roused, to an eager curiosity about the very things that at school had but irked him and been an unmitigated weariness to him. He now found that the thing to be expressed was the important thing, whereas formerly, in the schoolroom, ranged in a row of some score of indifferent yawning others, he had been whipped into regarding the way of saying it as of the only interest—nay, the sole interest of the schoolmaster.

To his profound astonishment, he found that these old books *meant* something—that they were not exquisite torture-racks, appointed by some vague, hated, and arbitrary governance over them, for the mere racking of their wits in the cracking of the nuts of grammar—that it was what these old fellows had seen and known and felt and thought that was worth the thinking and the puzzling out, and *not* the machinery of their thought.

So that what had aforetime gone in at one ear and out at the other now lodged in the brain and painted pictures in the imagination that none might rub out.

The boy had groaned over his Xenophon, until "Thence he advanced parasangs and stathmoi" had become the refrain of boredom as repulsive as the epileptic drivel of Revelation. He now discovered that the book contained one of the mighty adventures of the world. He stepped it out with Xenophon and the Ten Thousand in Cyrus's march, listened to the camp scandals of the years ago, thrilled by the perplexities and endurance and dangers and hair's-breadth escapes of the questionable undertaking; followed the great and dogged retreat; took a part in the passing incidents, hunting the bustards, tiring them down, and finding "the flesh of these birds very delicious."

He dawdled before Troy with the Homeric heroes, fought with them, listened to their gossip, bathed with them, sacrificed with them.

The Latin tongue revealed other emotions than the frenzy of doubt as to whether Caius and Balbus should build unending walls.

To him, Roman Horace, growing fat, unwieldy, laughing at his own disadvantages in subtle Latin verse, lolling about Mæcenas' villa, became a live acquaintance, as real as the people he rubbed against in the street.

And every day the number of his acquaintance grew.

As real, more definite than the swarm of boys with whom he had played at school, became Charlemagne and Clovis and Capet, Simon de Montfort, and Bastard William of Normandy and the First and Third Edwards of England, and Cromwell and Chatham and the men of the French Revolution. The very hours of the day, seasons of the year, became frequented with the association of the great dead, so that in the after-years of his manhood, at the break of day it almost seemed that there stole across the years, back over the edge of the drowsy world, out of old pilastered Greece, the hushed image of that festival drawing to its end when Socrates rises from the symposium, the last of his mighty boon companions, drawing his garments about him as he passes out from them that he has outstayed, where they lay adrowse and overcome with wine on couch and floor—in such strange fashion giving to the decaying genius of Greece the new ideals that were to prepare the civilized world for the coming of its Christ—a strange uncouth figure in a wondrous mist of dawn.

The twilight became haunted with the drowsy music of Grey's *Elegy*, sounding to some mystic fugue played with Handelian dignity upon the aerial organ of the winds.

The history of the mightiest people the world has seen leaped into life again, seen through the gossip eyes of them that had watched its pageant pass, its comedy and its tragedy—Pepys and Boswell, and the splendid gossips of their day—or in the mighty music of Carlyle's colossal and glowing imagination, of Oldmixon, of Macaulay and of Green.

In fact, the big gentle man taught the boy and girl the great aim of education—to know ; to educate themselves ; to have self-reliance ; to establish a code of conduct ; in a word, to form character. For, he pointed out to them, the good of the community is the highest human aim, and knowledge of this world the only basis on which to build conduct towards that end.

And, the morning's work done, he would counsel exercise, taking them himself sometimes to Booksellers' Row, walking beside them, with the great black cloak and theatrical strut, striking a little out of their way towards Soho, before they swung round into the Strand, to drag out Netherby to their frolics ; and the four of them, making down their beloved Strand, would haunt the Row by hours, poring over the stalls of the second-hand booksellers, garnering their rare pennies to thrilling purchases in the glorious dingy dusty narrow old picturesque alley of splendid treasure.

Indeed, Netherby Gomme did not lack bodily exercise in these days, for the boy and girl considered no junket complete without him. So Noll and Betty and he would go for walks to Chiswick, down the river to Hampton Court, stroll the Strand and gaze into the print-shops that lay thereabout, loiter on Westminster Bridge and wander in the Abbey ; haunt the picture-galleries and live in the pits of theatres, getting passes at times from the kindly bohemians to dress circles—and sometimes Julia would come, her long day's work being done.

And there was surely no better audience than they. They had the true theatric instinct—the right theatre spirit. They were in their seats as soon as the opened doors would let them enter. The tuning of the fiddles was exquisite music to their ears—an essential part of the drama. Every moment was precious to them. They would as lief have missed the rising of the great curtain, sweeping upwards with ecstatic jerk into the flies, as have gone out before the last act, or worn their hats to spoil the delight of others. For them the Theatre held something of a sacred pleasure—the dear pleasaunce of populous cities.

Ah, the golden age ! the days of the wide unquestioning delight in all things that is the eternal theatre of the childhood of the world—for, thank God, Fancy fills the very gutters of the street-children with faery. There is a world of delight enwrapped about a rag doll—when the world is young.

They were glad to be alive.

And as they took their pleasures, so they took their serious moods, taking the best from all that came. They would dawdle into the churches, leaving early when the parson was dry—Protestant and Papist, High and Low. Particularly the Roman

Catholic, drawn by the æsthetic beauty of the Service, and charmed by its exquisite symbolism—for they were children when all is said, questioning nothing that was established, accepting everything, believing in belief. And the lank awkward Netherby Gomme perhaps the simplest-hearted child of the three.

Alas ! that there should loom ever at the end of all things the threat of change ! And that the young feet, with restless skip, should go so eagerly to meet it !

The three went down to Burford Bridge one day—there having been much careful garnering of sixpences to that end.

They burst into the old inn—to be rebuffed.

The jolly old landlady was gone—their friend the ostler wholly vanished—no trace of him.

There was hint of sellings-up, and broken fortunes, and sad flitting from the old home.

Strange faces smiled these things down upon them indifferently, indulgently.

No, with headshakings, there were no prize-fighting ostlers that sang like baritone gods, no heroes nor colourable imitation of heroes in the stables—none. Nor indeed anything more romantic than racing touts—lazy rogues that sold the hay and corn when the watchful eye was not upon them. . . .

OF THE BUDDING OF THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

CHAPTER XVII

Which has to do with the Awakening of Youth

The boy and girl sprang up apace ; their brains developing added perception and quickness under Lovegood's tuition—wits are whetted by congenial wit.

The stripling's voice broke, lost its treble, and for awhile was awkward to the ear, as his lank limbs to the eye ; and atop of the change the down came upon his lip, adding the last touch of whimsy to youth's ungainliness. Betty came through the awkward age less awkwardly, showing a lithe gracefulness in her very lankness of limb.

The girl it was who began to show shy reservations.

The lad was becoming restless with—he knew not what. Coming adolescence was setting his youngster blood a-jigging. Boyhood was gone—youth not fully come. Romance was singing in his ears—adventure thrumming impatient fingers on the windows of his fancy—hot instincts leading his feet—wilfulness challenging his daring.

In all this dangerous period of his cubhood, the girl's sweet companionship steadied the lad—kept him from many tomfool waywardnesses. Her fragrant hair, loose-flowing to the winds, brushed his cheek and veiled him in from much unwholesomeness. The girl's slender gloved hands held the key to his nobility—opened to him only the view of the best that was in him ; whilst his protection of her, and his frank confidence in her, filled the lad's body with early manhood that had otherwise been filled with indecision and with many and uncouth vulgarities.

And just as, his voice breaking, a hoarser accent came into his speech, so, too, a more robust accent came into his thinking. He began to question, first of all here and there, then from roof to base, what he had accepted with a boy's frank acceptance.

The Why and the Whence and the Whither had begun to trouble.

He and Betty had taken to going to church of a Sunday evening. At last, puzzled by many things, the lad went boldly and called on the vicar. Encouraged by the well-bred courtesy of the gentle-hearted man and by the noble simplicity and selflessness of his life, and full of eager questionings, he had gone again

a time or so ; but he found his blunt queries evaded—the deep inmost and basic meaning of life and death, when he pressed for an answer, was at once thrust behind a screen of God and angels, seen dimly across a gulf of heavens and hells, in the human form and habit, and with those earthly functions of which the disembodied spirit had no further need, and through a veil of vague talk of the inspired word.

The inspired word !

Inspiration that could allow discrepancies in the simplest details of the most important things—one gospel giving the Annunciation to Mary, another to Joseph—one giving the Anointing by a woman to the beginning of the ministry, the others to the eve of the Crucifixion—all differing in the statement of the great and solemn act of the very Crucifixion—one stating that the Christ bore His cross, the others that Simon bore it—disagreeing even as to the bitter drink that was given and when given—disagreeing as to the hour of the great tragedy—every one of them all contradicting each other as to the sayings on the cross—the statement by Christ in one gospel to the repentant thief that they would that day be in Paradise denying that the Christ really descended into Hell and rose again the third day —one gospel contradicting the others as to the acts and sayings of these thieves—all at variance even about the last dying words—all writing different inscriptions over the suffering head—one stating that the body was embalmed, another denying its embalming.

There were larger discrepancies : How could the devil tempt God ? And even so, what virtue were in so easy a triumph ? Why had God, out of His creation of all things, created the devil ? How could He punish for sin who had created sin ? Why did God create a world so faultily that He Himself condemned it ? Why punish His own bungling upon His miserable creatures ? How could He set up as eternal reward the prospect of the good being with Him in the heavens and listening to the agony of the victims of His poor maimed handiwork in hell ? What had man done more loathsome than to create a Hell ? Was this gruesome heaven of gloating over the agony of the damned to be our Immortality ? If these things had been written to-day instead of coming out of the dim glamour of the centuries, would they be believed?

The vicar was genuinely shocked.

He stammered of Conduct—he did not guess the extent of the boy's reading.

The good man had always looked upon any who questioned Christianity as atheists and agnostics—upon atheists and agnostics as criminal and brutish persons. He had never realized that some of the noblest, greatest, purest and sweetest lives had been lived by these—nor that some of the foulest, most damnable, and criminal lives had been spent in vileness by princes of the Church.

The boy bent his brows on the old gentleman's embarrassment. . . .

Already bored by the vicar's dusty sermons, and now baffled to find that what had baffled him likewise baffled the vicar, he turned his back on the Church of his people and went with Betty to the pro-cathedral of Rome.

The beauty of the service, its music and its splendid symbolism, appealed for awhile to his artistic senses ; but the questionings soon began again to unsettle the lad. For he found that he could not get to the root of things in this exquisite place even as far as with his old vicar. He had imagined the Roman Church as united—as agreed. He found it racked from one end to the other by the warring pronouncements of the Fathers. The cardinal himself it was who blew up the bridge that spanned the road to Rome.

It was the day of a great mass at the Oratory. It had been noised abroad that the church was to be draped red with handsome draperies—that the cardinal was to speak, robed in his crimson vestments. All the leaders of society that held to the Papist tradition were to be there—and, as events turned out, there was, besides, a large gathering of Society that owned no allegiance to Rome, yet enjoyed a handsome pageant.

The boy and girl went—anxious to hear what message the illustrious prince of the Church had for their hearts—what guidance for their lives—what he had to say upon the great intellectual advancement of the age—what upon the great questions that loomed before the puzzled brain of man.

And he, the appointed spokesman of the infallible church, smooth-faced, aristocratic, magnificent, arose from his seat at his ordered place in the elaborate service, and his voice broke the musical refrain of the splendid ceremonial with disturbing accent but to reiterate the narrow message of his Church that only through absolute subjection of mind and body to the forms and traditions and quaint superstitions of that Church could man be saved from everlasting damnation ; and, with triumphant note, he revelled in the fact, and could get to little else, that the English Church, which had persecuted Rome for generations, had now begun to place her images upon its altars and in the emptied niches of its portals—had indeed filched the rubric and the habits and the symbols of his Church ! And, with exultant voice, swelling to arrogance, he, with the same lips that called his Church catholic, whilst in the very act of narrowing it to a parochial destiny, twitted with parochialism the land whose large religious toleration allowed his Church to live unmolested where that same Church had made a shamble and a stews when it was in power, debauching its once opportunity by fire and torture, showing in such strange hellish wise its large catholicism to such as had differed from its narrow creed. He spoke passionately of past persecution—he omitted to say who had taught the lesson.

But of the Why and the How and the Whence and the Whither —nothing. All the flattest Agnosticism. . . .

That evening the striplings, together with Netherby Gomme,

wandered, with a crowd that pressed, into the large and simple place of worship of a well-known chapel to hear a great Protestant preacher. This man, unaided by the gorgeous ritual of the morning that appealed to every artistic sense, made the simple Protestant claim to individual responsibility, to acts of life as against the ritual of churches. He ignored all Christolatry, as a grown man sets aside the toys of childhood, and his voice thundered that the life of the individual would be judged solely by the part it played towards the ennobling of the community. And he showed that just as Christianity had been born from the Jews and the Greeks, so had Protestantism in turn been born out of Rome ; and so must the future ideals of the great peoples, purified still more and more by rejecting the false and the superstitious, be born again out of this same Protestantism.

It was the large, daring, and frank mind of this man that roused the lad from the lethargic irresponsibility of his boyhood to his duty towards life. Just as the Romanist communion by its ideal of the salvation of the individual through and by the community has weakened the force of the individual, so the innate difference of the Protestant ideal, the salvation of the community by and through the individual, strengthened the lad's nerve and made his will resolute. He flung off his reliance on others and faced his life and his destiny.

He roused from the drowsy contemplation and the fantastic dreads of otherworldliness—ridiculous heavens and more ridiculous hells—and turned to life. For awhile he was not troubled. The genial optimism of youth came back to him.

It was soon after this stage of awakening intellectual unrest that the lad found himself embarked on the larger tide of the literary and intellectual unrest of the Continent.

Mixing more and more amongst the Bohemians, he found himself amongst frank and fearless thinking ; he was roused by the inquisitive genius of France—heard the first words of the daring speculations of German thought. He realized that religious teaching had passed from the Church to the newspaper—to literature—and to the arts ; that religion, from being a fierce war of priests, was become a searching into the everyday life of the community, was become a fierce desire to better that life. The angels were flown, theology gone to dust, and man was seeking after the godhead that is in him—he who had kissed the feet of idols, cringing for salvation in whimsical heavens, now stood up and looked at the meaning of manhood.

Thou Shalt Not was giving place to Thou Shalt.

CHAPTER XVIII

Of the Coming of Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre upon the Town

Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre had caught the ear of the town with the brazen strains of the New Literary Movement. Fresh from France, he had written a novel, Englished in the French idiom, and founded on the closely detailed, elaborately seen, unselected picture of life as it straggles by, that is called Realism—that movement which, combined with splendid courage, had lifted Zola to the front rank in contemporary French literature. Mr. Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre had all the faults without the genius of the Frenchman ; and, by consequence of these things, Mr. Myre had tasted the sweets of his first success of scandal. People had said that his book was indecent—and read it.

Mr. Myre had then struck one of his master-strokes, and straightway set himself up as lawgiver and head and front of Taste by criticising everybody and everything. And with a quick receptive mind for the catchpennies, the slang, and the cant of the studios and of the students' quarter, of the stage and of the literary schools, he had picked up the details of every movement in the restless air of Paris ; and he now proceeded to exploit them in London. That one thing flatly contradicted another gave him no embarrassment—he was there to harass and embarrass. Conventional critics went down before the cocksureness which was the flashy weapon of this, to them, most original man. The erratic amongst the journalists, they that live on the jigging foot, quick to see the vogue of this catchpenny-monger, were soon hard at it, too, seeking to gather in whilst the harvest was for the gathering, rushing to nature, or what their cockney senses told them was nature, so that when they conjured up the vision of the ploughman in the fields one perceived the sourness of his sweat rather than the fragrance of the earth or the mystic significance that is in the ploughing.

But Myre founded his eminence on no single dunghill. He set his building on a more certain base—he thrust down his

splay feet firm into popular Romance, and he saw to it that the whole whispering world should not miss it. He was living with one of the greatest French actresses of the day—and from Marguerite Olmé it must be set down in credit to his judgment he was catching a reflected glory that was far greater than his own.

Given boon companions, Myre was wont to make no secret of the fact, nay, rather a pretty confidence of it, that he was exploiting a great passion—"taking up a great woman's soul by the roots to examine it," was the florid paraphrase.

Art, said he, demanded every sacrifice.

That his extravagances were largely paid out of her bread-winnings he did not parade—as smacking perhaps of the too sordid. Realism has its limits. All nature is not to be crammed into an ink-pot nor three hundred pages. . .

Marguerite Olmé had come to play in England for three weeks. The French critics had set down her genius as the greatest of the age. In England, few people understanding her, this verdict had been enthusiastically repeated; and after a triumphant procession through the United States, where she was understood still less, it was written down that she was even greater than that. And indeed she was little less.

Meanwhile, Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre increased in violence and in volume, magnified by the reflected light; and his conceit grew ecstatic.

He made his enemies. They called him Quogge Myre, for short, or The Brixton Celt. There was some spite in it.

This at first fretted him somewhat. He had always been distressed that his name was only of one syllable—Shakespeare, Homer, Dante, Milton, Chaucer, Balzac were of two.

Still, there was Poe!

He tried his own name on his tongue. He wondered if it could ever sound like the name of a man of genius.

Then there came to him a sudden glow—it was more original.

He felt that the time was come to gather in disciples; he chose a foreign restaurant, in the French quarter where, he darkly hinted in the press, and to all and sundry, that the wits might be seen of an evening, glittering resplendent. It was at this time that he gave forth the now famous essay in which he showed once for all how the home life checked the range of genius; in which he proved how the wifely *milieu* stunted the view and narrowed the eagle flight of the original intellect; that same essay in which he showed that a woman should be well content to be simply beautiful, relying on man's chivalry for her sufficient empire; in which he also proved beyond shadow of doubt that it was due to the meeting of the wits in the tavern and the resulting whetting of the national genius that the French achievement so far transcended the English—indeed, he pointed the moral in a florid picture of Shakespeare glittering at

the Sign of the Mermaid—he even invented some lines for Shakespeare.

The tavern club was like to be born again.

Netherby Gomme, seeing the inquisitive mind of the lad Noll beginning to run upon the literary warfare of the day, set Noll's heart jigging one evening by calling for him, together with the airy Fluffy Reubens, and taking him out into the London night to spend an hour or two at the great man's tavern.

CHAPTER XIX

Wherein a Strutting Cock comes near to Losing a Feather upon his Own Dunghill

At a table, with his disciples, sat Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre—a slack-headed, loose-lipped, colourless-haired, untidy-minded fellow enough to outward seeming.

As Noll listened to his affected voice and caught the tenor of his mind he understood why the man was known amongst the robuster wits as The Brixton Celt.

Sitting next to him, and admiring himself in a mirror opposite, was his friend the poet Aubrey, who, it must be acknowledged, paid but little attention to anyone but himself. As Noll entered the place Myre's loud drawl was giving utterance to the innuendo that the love of woman was only worth the seeking in order "to take her soul up by the roots and examine it"; on which Aubrey had raised a laugh somewhat at his own cost and yet with a certain vague undefined loss to the Quogge Myre, by saying:

"I personally am content to take up my own soul by the roots and examine it."

When the ironic applause and laughter were run down, Aubrey, still gazing at himself, said:

"That laugh is sheer affected hypocrisy. I am of the only importance—that is the only real heart's creed of man." And he added lovingly: "I thank God that I am beautiful—very beautiful."

It was a historic night. . . .

Quogge Myre had been irked of late by the perpetual reference to him as the English Zola. He felt that he ought to be original. He saw that he must again strike a new and original note. Above all he felt that Realism was running dry—the public were grown used to it; nay, worse, the public had accepted it at his estimate.

On this evening he had planned the surprise of a great Renunciation. One or two sonnets had been given by poets, as was the custom in Parisian students' taverns, before Myre himself arose to read an essay he had just written, and thus give to the privileged few the advantage of the earliest communion with his latest thought.

He astounded them that were gathered about him by attacking

Zola and Realism with bitterness; and he solemnly announced his decision to break with the movement for ever.

All these little men stared aghast—they had only just acquired the style and method and some little vogue upon their capture of the tricks of this very Realism. And for a few moments they were dumfounded.

Had they not "written each other up" on their mastery of this very craft!

Even they, like Myre, had discovered that the superficial tricks were easily captured.

But, as Myre read, they began to glow, as though in some measure sharing in his greatness—he put that hint to them with subtlety.

It was that famous essay in which he showed, once for all, with aggressive air as though the prophet of the gospel, that Realism was a Failure—that all Art must be symbolical. Though he still maintained that the expression of it must be of the hammered and perfect metal called Style, he had overstated the case for style—but he did not withdraw everything. He had said that Style was the All in All—that the matter did not matter. He renounced that position. Style was important, but it was the symbols that were significant in art. . . . Then this man, who baldly stated how he had thrust himself upon Zola, proceeded to tell how he had tricked Zola into giving him the advertisement of his praise, how he had lied to him, how he now despised him, because Zola, being grown rich, wrote in a room that was a bourgeois ideal of handsome furnishing. He employed all his sarcasm on making ridiculous what only the genial hospitality of the kindly Frenchman could have thrown open to his treacherous censure; and he ended with a scalding attack on the coarseness of Zola's work and on the lack of its artistry. For himself—he had discovered a greater master, whose name was Ibsen. "In so far as my work has unwittingly been symbolical," said he, with the majesty of a great renunciation, "in so far has it been good. For the rest, it has been written in vain. . . ." To achieve the masterpiece, he was content to go to the Greeks—to Æschylus, to Euripides, to Aristophanes, to Sophocles in drama, to Homer in the Epic, to Phidias in art—the Greeks, he averred, recorded only the Inevitable Thing.

As the great man sat down amidst a thunder of applause, Noll leaned over to a pimpled disciple:

"Tell me," said he—"what has this man done?"

The youth gazed at him:

"Oh, it isn't that he has done anything yet," he said. "That will come. He has the right attitude."

The pimply young man blew out cigarette smoke.

Netherby Gomme rose to his feet:

"I should like to ask our Master," said he, without trace of smile on his cadaverous face, "and I ask it because I have only read Sophocles in the translation—to which of the plays of Sophocles did he allude when he burst into his splendid eulogy

of the Greek genius just now—*Œdipus Tyrannus*, or *Ajax* or *Hecuba*, or was he thinking of the *Prometheus Bound?*"

Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre licked his puffy red lips uncomfortably, but said nothing. He smiled cynically to cover his hesitation—the fact was that he had never read a play by Sophocles, even in translation. There was a long tense pause.

"Sophocles had the right attitude in *all* his plays," he said at last—"what is true of one is true of all."

Netherby sat down, and laughed loud and long:

"Spoken like a game-cock!" cried he—"if a game-cock could sing——"

Noll touched his sleeve confidentially:

"But, Netherby," said he—"Sophocles did not write *Prometheus Bound*. It was——"

"Hush, Noll—the ass hasn't the smallest idea of that——"

Myre was uneasy, feeling he had not been wholly secure, when all eyes turned upon the entry into the café of a very beautiful young woman.

She walked to a small table and sat down.

Myre at once became hysterical; and proceeded to embarrass the girl with his vulgar eyes.

She ordered some coffee of the waiter, and, fretted by the admiring stare of these gentlemen, soon rose from the table, shortened her skirts above her dainty ankles, and went out into the night.

Myre, offended by the girl's ignoring, said:

"The amateur is sapping the arts of all strength. The county gentry are destroying painting and the drama. That woman is an exquisite stick on the stage—she is connected with a peer."

"Not by marriage, I suppose," said a handsome youth flippantly; and rising from his chair with Byronic gloom, he put on his silk hat—"I must follow her; she is very beautiful."

He followed her.

When he was gone, the pimply young man leaned over to Noll, and said with hushed admiration:

"Bartholomew Doome—the wickedest man in London."

"Indeed," said Noll—"what does he do?"

"He has never been known to give way to a decent emotion," said the youth. . . .

The next day, Mr. Myre bought a translation of the plays of Sophocles, and armed himself against his disciples. A cold sweat broke out upon him as he paid the price and realized how near he had come to losing his wits on his own particular dunghill.

CHAPTER XX

Wherein Master Devlin throws a Fierce Sidelight upon the Genius of Poetry

LITERATURE might be born and die, and pass wholly away ; but the wordy warfare of the distracted parties to each quarrel roused no such serious questioning in the most perfervid contestant's thinking parts as was now troubling our Noll—the down was on his lip and chin and cheek ; and the getting rid of it had mastered his ingenuity. He was balked. The flame of a match had sent the fluff to the ceiling in æthereal dust more than once ; but now the increasing stiffness threatened bristles. He must be driven to the razor or to untidiness—and the eyes of young women forbad the untidiness. In his difficulty he put the point to Netherby Gomme ; and Gomme, grimly suppressing the smile that lurked behind his serious eves, led off the lad forthwith to his barber. It was thus that Noll first came to frequent the place where the wits lost whatsoever strength of hair lay in them.

Mike Devlin was lord and leading man of action in the rooms —and it is doubtful if he were not the leading wit—if we may judge by the relics of it that still do duty amongst the youth of the parish. He had two white-coated assistants in his clipping ; they made the laughter to his airinesses also, when chins were slow in the wagging, coyly and splutteringly as they dared.

A cling of the shop's bell.

The little cockney Irishman roused at sight of Netherby Gomme, and, at the word, he soon had Noll swathed in cloths and bibs and towels, and was lathering the soapsud on his face.

Devlin opened a long friendship with the youth by subtlety, shaving deftly the while over somewhat smooth ground :

" You're in literatoor, sorr, I'll be thinkin'?" said he.

" H'm, h'm !" grunted the youth ; and added dryly : " More or less."

He winked to Gomme, feeling the joke was with him—and the alert Devlin, catching the wink, saw that the boy was at ease. The first shave, Devlin was wont to say, was as distressing to one's egoism as the marriage service to a maiden's modesty.

" It won't be po'try, will it, sorr?" asked Devlin.

Noll shook his head :

"No," said he.

Mike Devlin smiled:

"I'm thinkin' it's not aisy to put poets under Mike Devlin's hands without me knowing the feel of them. I can just smell them. Be Joshua, I shaved one every mornin', when it wasn't afternoon, for eight months on this very floor, and I got used to the feel of them. . . . Ah, that was a great poet, mind ye. Eh? I've clean forgot his name, but he was a great hairy man wid a head on him like a dam besom—ye could have swept Fleet Street wid him. . . . When that man walked down the street the whole town looked at him and said That's a blarsted poet! . . . Begod, yes, that was a great poet. When he'd got the frenzy on him he hadn't the time to clean himself. Eh, sir? What did he write? Why, just po'try. His shoulders was stooped with the application of him—begod, the very trousers on him betrayed the genius in him; they had knees on them like a horse that's endin' his days in the cab traffic. Oh, yes; ye could see the great man just fretted the pantaloons off himself wid worryin' at the rhymes. . . . Po'try's an oneasy means of livelihood, I'm thinkin'. . . . And, in fact, I had a slap at it meself. . . . I tried to pull off one of these pastorals, they call it, wid the cattle goin' down to the drink and the great dirty blacksmith leanin' on the anvil, takin' a spit at his hands and makin' the sparks fly, and the blacksmith's daughter wid the beauty of old Trotter's yellow-haired barmaid on her; but the divil a rhyme could I get to the blacksmith's daughter but "fills her leathern sides wid water." Well, in comes the poet one morning and asks me if I've made me will; but I told him my paleness was due to the po'try, and that it made life too oneasy and I was going to shake it off me heels. What's the matter wid po'try? says he. Wid that I discovered me tribulation to him, and he mighty nearly got the whooping-cough—he told me I had better put aside the seductions of the Muse, I was sufferin' from the echoes of old refrains. But it didn't cost me a night's sleep, thank God. Ye know, after all, sir, po'try's like the hair-cuttin'—ye've got to be born to it, or ye've got to lave it severely alone. . . . Eh, sir? Ah, yes—be the gospels, he was a great poet—ye could smell the midnight oil on him. He just lived at the desk, gettin' the rhymes into collusion. Genius? he was full of it. Free love was nothin' to that man. Aisy, sorr, or I'll be cuttin' the nose off of ye! But as he said to me himself, there's one law for genius, Devlin, and there's another law for the middle classes; and it's bad morals of the middle classes to try and usurp the weaknesses of their betters, says he. By the book, yes; he had the hall-mark of genius on him—he had the divil's own contempt for the middle classes. They were like orange-peel under the great heels of the man. . . . Po'try's a pagan callin', says he, when all's said—and if ye're goin' to make po'try ye've got to live it like a pagan, says he. And, by jewry, he did. Pagan he was—as Pompey's pillar. Eh, sorr? Can't I remimber annything he wrote? . . . God knows. They tell me it was mostly

poems ; but I keep to the accidents and the police reports, wid a dash of the politics, in the newspapers—the damned rhymes and superfluities always take my attention from the meanin' of the sense—I'm that nervous all the time that the fellow will get his rhyme nately fixed up in the next line, by the popes I always forgit what the tune's about."

He stood off, and, head on one side, looked at the youth's clean-shaven face with the air of an artist.

"Mind ye, sorr," said he, damping the soap off his face—"I'm not blamin' the poets. That's a queer onnatural life they lead. Mr. Myre, that was in here just now, was complainin' to another genius of the damn hard life of it he had, what wid the sinfulness of his natural nature, and his emotions, and the doing of things that wasn't expected of him, and all the celebrated women after him —but now, *there's* a man that stands to his principles like a hairy Afghan to his fowlin'-piece—he was sayin' that an artist must have *lived*—and it is a part of his sacrifice to himself that he should debauch himself for the good of posterity, otherwise he only guesses at life like the maiden aunt lookin' furtively over the window blind at the drama of the street. Begod, it's the keen satirical tongue he has, Mr. Myre, when he's pullin' the leg of the maiden aunt. . . . *And* the self-respect av him !" . ...

CHAPTER XXI

Which discovers a Great Man in the Hour of his Triumph

Mr. Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre stood at the windows of the best rooms of the best hotel in London—he enjoyed the fine view, the great reach of the Thames—the towers and ancient majestic piles and many-windowed warehouses turning to fairy palaces in the lilac haze of the coming twilight.

The great actress's infatuation for him brought him his every desire in these days ; and he felt that such was as it should be—it was pathetic to think of the number of common-minded persons who must have lived in that room and seen no beauty in the world. Nay, it was a crime. He sighed that Nature was so wasteful.

He stood, his hands behind his back, his colourless hair with its untidy forelock over his paste-coloured forehead, a smirk under his drooping, ill-kempt moustache. His sloping shoulders shrugged content :

" God !" said he—" this is my day."

Indeed, Mr. Myre was thrilled at a far more emotional prospect than any view of a Thames reach. For days the newspapers had been quarrelling over him—his name was everywhere. Worry, worry, worry ! and in the midst of the din was always Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre.

He had struck a masterstroke. . . .

Quogge Myre had become weary of his scandal. The novelty of his relation to Marguerite Olmé was flown. He was not even barred. People treated it as carelessly as though it had been marriage. Nay, worse ; society was grown tired of it—he was not asked out so much as he had been.

He could see nothing more to be got out of the romantic association ; he had had a splendid flash of life with her, the glamour that still remained was but the after-glow——

And the stage notoriously aged women !

He was no weakling to dawdle on in the twilight of a romance, kicking his feet aimlessly through the fallen leaves of a withered passion.

He saw that he must do something original—or with an original air.

He had conceived a bold scheme for a renewal of public interest in him and his works.

He had given to the world a recklessly daring account of his most intimate relations with the great actress, thinly disguised as a romance—indeed, he had forestalled all misunderstanding, had drawn aside all shred of disguise, by inspiring preliminary paragraphs in the press.

The result went beyond his wildest hopes; raised him beyond his fondest conceit.

The clamour was prodigious; indeed, it did the English press credit, for it displayed a lurking sense of decency, a hint of manhood in the shabbiest.

The abuse brought this man to the front again; and the curiosity of smart society was again assured towards him.

And it would do more—it would make a dramatic end to his life with the great actress. He had revealed all the secrets of her dressing-table, the little makeshifts of figure, the use of additions to Nature's artistic handicraft.

It had only been fair to himself; for she had begun to be tedious—a bore—humiliation. To sit opposite to the same woman at table day after day! It cramped his imagination. There were two or three other women—it might make a difference if he were not tied to this one—he had only made one mistake—he ought to have cleared off the whole of his debts before he published the book—but——

His man came in.

Yes, he would dress for dinner. But he had accepted two invitations for that night—to which of these handsome women must he send the telegram of his inability to go?

He decided to dine with the countess.

Quogge Myre adored the "intelligent" peerage.

In her rooms in Paris sat Marguerite Olmé, reading a book.

She had been reading it all day—and the red blood burned her face with shame. She missed no word of the brutal details of her most intimate life with this man—there was little reservation, even by innuendo.

The elbow-nudgings and the leer at her love-ecstasies—nay, at the very manner in which she had hidden the only small defect of her figure; the display of all her bodily habits; the jibes at the little reliances on the arts of her dressing-table; the sneers at the coming little threat of wrinkles, at the grey threads of hairs amongst the glorious nut-brown masses—tshah! She had been a mad fool to love a man twelve years her junior! Poor fool, she blamed *herself!*

It was one of those books that are written by such men as batten, parasitic, louse-like, upon a woman.

And this one not only battened upon her means, but upon her reputation, her honour, her affections, her very soul.

Merely to be rich is to live in the most vulgar state of poverty.

There have been colossal sneaks in the world of letters, that

have not been without genius—Rousseau, de Musset, and the rest —though their genius has been somewhat rotten at the core. We read every line of Rousseau with suspicion, for is there not haunting every line he wrote, threading in and out through all, the ignominy of the dirty little caddish soul that slimes the pages of his *Confessions?* And what man does not feel his sex outraged by the hermaphroditic venom of de Musset as he sullies the frail love of George Sand?

To betray the woman whose sole folly has been that she loved you! Even though but for a gadding while.

A woman can give a man nothing greater than the love of her life—that is the weightiest dower. It is beyond a price. The sentences that can only be whispered—the sentences that cannot be whispered—the tendernesses—the surrenders—the endearments—the mystic emotions that reach in the love of man and woman the nearest to some ecstatic conception of the mystery of life, that are the worthy beginnings of a new life, these things can only be lived; they cannot be spoken of even by the most reverent tongue; but when their exposure is made the foul weapon with which to wound the woman for her only fault in having surrendered herself to an egregious cad, that cad is only fit to be spat upon. The betrayal of the Christ was to this a healthy sin. Such a dirty rogue should be blotted out. The wit of such a man must stink—if he have wit. The art of such a man must be a foul sore. The influence of such a man must be a filthy disease; his companionship a loathsome suppuration; his life a paltry ignominy.

Marguerite Olmé brushed back her hair from her brow with the wondrous hands that were as eloquent as her voice. She was stunned with shame.

She uttered a little moan, when she should have answered a light knock at the door.

Her maid entered:

"Madame—it is time to dress for the play—it is the first night of——"

"Hush, Ernestine!" she said hoarsely; and the girl was startled at the voice.

"Madame is ill?"

The girl ran to her as to a child.

"No——"

The wounded woman stroked the girl's shoulders, and signed to a desk; the maid brought her pen and ink and paper.

After she had written awhile, the great actress handed the maid a book and a letter:

"Ernestine—this is like a play, isn't it?" She smiled: "Burn that," she said—"and post this."

Mr. Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre was released from his bondage quite easily. He was cast off.

He read the letter, shrugged his shoulders, flung the scented notepaper into the fire. He had promised to read her letter to

his admirers—when it came. He decided that he must invent one instead. Yet—this one—well——

It was simple enough—quite devoid of style :

"Mr. Myre would do well to avoid Madame Olmé's house in the future, as the footmen have orders to flog him down the stairs."

Mr. Myre smiled :

"The French are so melodramatic !" he said.

CHAPTER XXII

Wherein we are obliged to Spend a Brief Moment in the Company of the Titled Aristocracy

Anthony Baddlesmere stood brooding in the middle of his room, his hands behind his back, and his wits hammering in his skull.

"Tsh—sh!"

He wondered how it was that he had not seen this tangle until now.

The boy was gone; into his place had stepped a youth—Noll was on the verge of manhood. And the lad had the firm mouth and the strong jaw of the Baddlesmeres.

It had all flashed upon him suddenly; thus:

As he came up the steps to enter the house, the door had opened and there had stepped thereout a very beautiful girl of near sixteen, her skirts not quite as long as they might have been; and beside the girl had walked a handsome youth—his son Noll.

Ought this thing to be?

This girl's father, Modeyne, was a gentleman—as a matter of fact of as good blood as himself, if they came to the arbitrament of the Heralds' Office. But he was utterly unclassed! The fellow was become an Outsider. He was only to be seen in the city, and—pah! with such a rank gang of vulgarians! men whose loud clothes were always aggressively well-brushed, whose hats, worn rakishly to a side, were aggressively shiny, whose glittering boots were always aggressively new and suggestive of the aggressively expensive, whose aitches were the only articles of subtlety and rarity that they paraded, whose manners were overbearing and authoritative. God! Modeyne, even when drunk, shone, for all his falling away, the only man of breeding in the company.

Still—he was the falling star.

The girl had not a chance. So Anthony argued—with what is called the world's wisdom—and proceeded to take the most elaborate precautions that she should not have a chance.

Noll's calf-love for the girl must be killed. By Venus! she was uncommon handsome—there was that excuse for the lad.

But how ?

At any rate, there was no time to be lost.

This boy Noll was come within two lives of the Cavil property —there was only one between his mother and the peerage.

He thought it would be a mistake to say anything to Caroline about it. She might go into opposition.

He would make the journey to Cavil and see the old lord at once. It would mean the eating of much pride ; it would choke him ; but——

Stay. An alienated relative makes but a treacherous ally. Yet——

Lord Wyntwarde strode up and down the great library at Cavil, where he transacted his business, and all such other like unpleasantnesses, amongst the books he never read, his hands in his breeches pockets ; and he laughed harshly. He was just in from riding ; and his pink hunting-coat, his breeches and long boots were splashed with mud.

Anthony, standing in a window, grimly watched him prowling.

The old lord threw back his head as he tramped the floor :

" Ho, ho !" he bawled, " friend Anthony ! I spoke like the damned minor prophets, after all, hey ! . . . So you come to me ! . . . By the dogs, I said it. But you are three years before my prophecy. . . . You play the cat and banjo with my dates. You make me too previous." He turned, clinking his spurs as he trod his heels into the thick carpets. " I saw the cub's birth in the papers. . . . seventeen years and a while ago. But, the cast-iron joke of it ! that *you* should come to prevent a marriage with an undesirable. Hoho—ho ! . . . I swore it—I swore it should be so. . . . Gods ! how the world goes round ! Round and round and round. And no one grows a peppercorn the wiser. . . . Not a damn peppercorn. Tshah ! *I* did it. But then I foresaw that all the Wattleses would pour their vast wealth into our coffers—they love to have a lord in the family down by Birmingham. Nevertheless, *I* married a vicar's daughter against my father's will—and she brought forth Ponsonby ! . . . Gods ! have you seen the Thing ?"

Anthony said not a word.

The old lord took to his pacing again :

" By the dogs, an abortion. He cannot stay on a horse long enough for it to kill him. A horse ! Dogs, he hasn't even the blood of the Wattleses in him—he'd turn giddy on an office-stool unless he were strapped to it. He is the very pick of dancing-masters—he has cast back to the bank-manager, except that he can't count. There he stands against God's heaven, a knock-kneed reproach to his Maker. . . . The nearest thing he gets to a horse is to wear riding-breeches and long boots on the parades of fashionable watering-places. But he has thrown out a virtue we none others have had—he has not gone into opposition to the head of his house. He will be the twenty-sixth in the title, and the other twenty-four have pulled their fathers' beards. He has

promised never to marry without my approval. . . ." He tramped silently for awhile, and burst out again: "And so you think I will refuse to have a word to say to your cub! Well, you are mistaken. But it is on conditions—you understand—on conditions."

Anthony nodded:

"I must know the conditions," he said.

"You must? Hoho! still the organizer of victory, eh!"

Anthony said nothing.

He stood and watched the striding figure before him, and bit his teeth on all repartee. He had a dogged desire to win that which he had come to ask; and he was not going to lose it for the sake of a score in grooms' badinage.

He left the waggeries to the noble lord.

"Look here, friend Anthony—your uncle sold the estates, and rotted in Boulogne. And the county dropped him—he only had the portraits with him when he died. Well! does the world remember that *you* come of the Plantagenets? does the county remember that your sires were William of Normandy and Charlemagne and Louis Debonair? Not a whit. It thinks you are a damned scribbling fellow; and, by the dogs, you are. And the lordship of the manor is gone to some cheesemonger from down South—and, hoho! I swear it, your arms are on his carriage panels, the great damned peacock's tail for crest, and the scarlet torteaux and the blessed chevron. All taken over with the lordship of the manor. Yes, by the three scarlet tortoises, their women are wonderful! brand new popinjays on a brand new stick. Nothing old and dingy in the old home, I can promise you—Chippendale and the eighteenth century all thrust out o' doors, gone to the workmen's cottages—and the rooms heavy with full-bellied comfortable saddle-bag lounges and the Latest Thing. But—mine host is in Burke, and glitters in Debrett. And you? Beelzebub! you scribble. You are gone down to the bottom of an inkpot. And the boy! our good Oliver—where will *he* go? Yet, by my soul, you did one clean thing—you called him after me—you had sufficient pride to put aside your dirty conceit and give him the name of the house. Wherefore, since he is an Oliver, and since he has gone into opposition to his father, who went into opposition to me—and since two negatives make an affirmative—therefore and whereby and notwithstanding, I'll help the boy; but I say it shall be on conditions."

Anthony's one dread was lest he should discover that Caroline was not in the surrender.

"And the conditions?" he asked.

"Now, don't you begin hectoring me!"

The bloodshot eyes turned glaring upon the silent figure of Anthony that stood sullenly in the window.

Anthony laughed sadly.

"There is very little of Hector left in me," he said. "I had hoped to have made a decent competency for the boy—but I

have failed. . . . Perhaps I ought to say that it was not on my own account that I came here. I remember another and very serious reason—one that I thought would appeal to you—and—I think it is the real reason at bottom for your sudden burst of generosity."

The clinking of the spurs and the striding up and down the room began again :

"I have not forgotten that there is only Ponsonby between master Oliver's mother and me. I have not forgotten why you married his mother, Master Anthony. . . . That was why I prophesied. . . . Prophecy ?" He snorted : "Prophecy be hanged ! It was a jabbering of dead certainty."

Anthony's face flushed hotly :

"There is one thing I will not allow—though the boy rot for it—the lie of omission," he said.

"Who lies?"

The tramping ceased.

Anthony looked him steadily in the eyes :

"You have forgotten something, Lord Wyntwarde. There was a time when you were not so pat with a lie."

"I have forgotten nothing."

"You have forgotten to add that you had four children alive—and a brother. We scribbling folk call that the lie of omission ; we consider it the lowest of falsehoods. We even hold it a dishonour to utter it."

The bloodshot eyes ceased their glare ; and the striding began again :

"Still the damned authority on all the moralities," said my lord.

As a fact, he was pleased at the show of fire. He had begun to think this man had lost courage ; and he would have trampled him under foot for it. Your braggart only understands courage when it is announced by trumpet. As it was, he remembered the ugly threat of a whip that he had once been under from this fellow. It came to him that he had played the bully to the limits.

He went to the bell and rang it ; and got to pacing the room again, brooding, until a footman opened the door.

"Tell Mr. Fassett I wish to see him," said his lordship.

"Yes—my lud."

A silent chaplain entered the room almost before the servant was gone, and, glancing at his striding lord and his guest, he obeyed the sign to sit down at the desk, noiselessly took his way to it, and placed himself thereat.

"Fassett," said Wyntwarde, prowling the while—"I want notes made upon these points : My kinsman, Oliver Baddlesmere, a young fellow about to go up to Oxford, is to go to Magdalen. The day he writes to me for supplies from Magdalen he is to receive three hundred pounds—and he is to receive it each year he goes up. Any bills in reason for hunters, or in relation to hunting, I will pay—and all wine that shows a gentleman's

judgment. Hatch, my wine-merchant, shall give him open credit—and be judge between us. I expect him to live at the university for his intellectual pleasure and in the society of gentlemen; not like a damned curate or a schoolmaster. And the day he enters Parliament or the Guards or some other club where gentlemen live decent unlaborious lives, his income will be doubled, and, if need be, trebled. Otherwise he may go to the devil—I forget how a parson puts it, Fassett—and whistle down his nose for sixpences, or draw little pictures for the illustrated papers, or whatever else that is the low way these sort of people grub up a livelihood in the arts."

He went to the bell and rang it; and turning to Anthony he added:

"There are a lot of handsome women with dull husbands staying in the house, friend Anthony." He laughed roughly: "But I suppose it's no use asking you to stay for dinner."

He turned to the footman who appeared at the door; and, before Anthony could answer, he said:

"This gentleman must catch the next train to town."

He waved his hand with a curt "Good-day"; and tramped out of the room on clanking heels.

Anthony decided, thinking it out in the train, to tell Caroline of what had passed, and of the need for getting Noll coached at once for the next term at Oxford.

He did not see any particular reason why the lad should go to the university; but everyone did go—it was the thing to do. And then—there was the girl——

He thought, all things considered, there was no need to mention Betty Modeyne.

CHAPTER XXIII

Wherein the Major fights a Brilliant Rearguard Action; and Beats off a Pressing Attack

It was the hour of social calls.

The suburban world was a-rustle in its best clothes, sallying forth in carriage and on foot to play at being in the whirl of fashion; Major Modeyne stood in drunken dignity on the white-washed steps of the house, his coat turned outside in, his shirt hanging out before and behind, and flouted by street-boys. And the whole stucco front blushed with shame.

Even the titter in the areas, where kitchen-maids peeped through the railings at the rare comedy, was not without some sense of adverse criticism.

His "friends" in the city had thought the joke a killingly funny one; indeed, when, at the door of *The Cock and Bull* in Fleet Street, the Major had thanked them for the honour of their friendship, and, with a rending hiccup, had started amidst street urchins on his solemn homeward procession in this guise early in the afternoon, they had clung to each other and had wept with laughter, hysteric at the splendour of their humour. Nay, it provoked a mighty thirst and much recounting of whimsical details in drinking shops for a long day. The story grew. . . . But now that he was arrived in his own street, the pestering swarm of street-urchins that buzzed at the Major's straying heels feared the joke was cracked—yet they were loath to give up the tattered shreds of it whilst there was a guffaw left to them. The point of honour during the journey had been to get in under the play of the Major's cane, and pluck a strip off his shirt-tails; it had been a running fight as long as he tramped the streets, the victory now with the boys, now with the Major's lunge of cane; but the gallant officer stood at last before his stronghold, and his back was to it. A bloody nose or so amongst the boys showed that the old soldier had not wholly lost the cunning of a heavy hand.

Yet he was vaguely troubled where he stood. He questioned his ability to mount the steps unaided—and mount them he must before he could achieve the ringing of the bell; he feared also that it would involve the turning of his back upon the enemy. With masterly coolness of judgment, he decided to wait until somebody

came to the house, and then to conduct his retreat, under cover of their entry, to the citadel.

A crowd collected.

It was at this dramatic pause that the landlady and her daughter, returning from envious viewing of the Quality rolling by in the Park, came upon the scene.

The Major, with wonted gallantry, and a somewhat wide miss or two of his hand at the object, swept off his hat ; but the effort lost him his legs, and he suddenly sat upon the steps—the hat flinging out into the road, where it was rushed off with a wild whoop by triumphant urchins and became the football of a fierce game, in which many goals were kicked over neighbouring lamp-posts.

The two women, brushing their skirts aside, passed by the fallen Major haughtily. He made a vigorous effort to go up the steps on all fours after the ladies ; he reached the topmost as they slammed the door in his face.

He sat on the doorstep, and shook his head sadly. . . .

Thus Anthony Baddlesmere found him.

Anthony was slackening his pace, hesitant, wondering how to avoid the embarrassment of getting into the house—there was the rustle of a girl's dress as she flipped past him, light feet ran up the steps, and Betty, ringing the bell, stooped down, gave her father her arm, and, as he struggled to his feet, led him into the yawning doorway.

Anthony stepped in after them ; and the door was shut.

He felt a sudden sense of shame that he had allowed the girl to do what he himself had a little feared to do ; and he helped her now to get her father up the stairs and into his room. Arrived thereat and entering, she led the poor dazed soul to an armchair, settled him there comfortably, with mother hands, then went to the windows and flung them open. When she turned, it was to find two angry women in the room—the landlady and her daughter had entered without leave or asking, and instantly began a torrent of upbraiding.

Betty went to them :

" He cannot understand now—better come to-morrow morning," she said gently ; and they, opening the door, conquering a stubborn desire to stay, slowly went out.

Anthony hesitated, not quite knowing what to do.

He looked at the girl.

The firm mouth was set ; but there was no sign of complaint nor of anger upon her.

He felt a certain meanness in the object of the journey from which he was just returned.

The poor drunken man began to upbraid himself.

" Hush, father," said the girl——

He hiccupped :

" I am very drunk," he said. " Why deny it ?"

" Ah, father ! that you should have come out into the day at last ! . . . I have feared this—for years."

He tearfully protested that he never tasted any drink stronger than coffee before the sun set—and this came of breaking his principles.

The girl laughed sadly, and went to the window.

"Betty," said Anthony at last—"can I do nothing for you?"

She shook her head:

"Nothing," she said. "His will is gone."

She was acquiring knowledge of the world early, this girl—and at first-hand.

The next morning, Major Modeyne read a letter at breakfast, and having read it, watching Betty furtively out of the corners of his eyes, he stealthily took advantage of her attention being fixed upon the tea-making to put the letter into his pocket.

It was a discomforting, abusive, cruel letter, and it said that he and his daughter received notice to vacate their rooms that day week—that there would be a cab waiting for them and their baggage as soon as it was dark, and that they must go, even if the law were employed to eject them.

It stated what it had to say harshly, vulgarly, blatantly. It was not the kind of letter that raises a man's self-respect.

The week passed.

The Major had never been gayer, more debonair. He glittered. He was a very sun. When he returned at night few knew. But the mornings saw him blithe and tuneful.

The landlady and her daughter began to feel qualms. Still, they hardened their hearts; and it was not until the morning of the last day of the grace given him that the Major alluded to the unpleasant affair.

He sent the little maid-of-all-work to say that he wished to see the ladies if they could spare him five minutes—it would only take three. He was ushered into their little sitting-room with all the formalities he himself observed with so rigid an etiquette.

"Well, Major!" The landlady broke an embarrassed silence.

"Ladies," said he—"I received a letter a week ago for which I have expected a formal apology. It has not been tendered."

The ladies stiffened, ruffled.

The elder said:

"Major Modeyne, we hope you do not intend to make us use pressure to you."

"No lady's pressure has ever met rebuff from me," said the Major gallantly. "I would meet the lady half way."

The daughter sniffed:

"Major, you are pulling ma's leg," she said.

"Then, madam," said the Major—"this is no place for her daughter."

"You are trying to be funny, Major," said the young woman huffily.

"Madam, most serious. For, were I to show indignation in my denial I should cast aspersion on a handsome limb; were I to

fail in denying the soft impeachment I should entangle the limb in the moralities. You place me in the unhappy position known as the quandary. I can only escape from that position by saying that I have every confidence in your mother, and that it is my habit to keep her comely figure out of the gossip."

"Lor, Major—I don't know what you are getting at!"

"That I have pulled nothing," said the Major solemnly.

"What do you want?"

"Ah, yes," said the Major—"I came for the apology."

"Then you don't get it," said the young woman tartly.

The Major bowed.

"That, madam, is a matter of taste."

The young woman tossed her head:

"We don't need to go to a school of manners, Major Modeyne."

The Major bowed again:

"The letter," said he, "is illegal."

The women looked at each other uncomfortably.

"What?" said the daughter.

"Do not be alarmed, ladies; I did not say libellous. God forgive me, it is not that. But it contains instructions about my daughter that cannot hold in the law. My daughter has done nothing deserving of censure; and it is utterly out of your power to eject her from her room. The notice to quit rests with my daughter—and it is my intention that it shall always so rest."

The younger woman sniffed:

"Major," said she, "no one wants to give Miss Betty a shade of trouble—but *you* must leave at dark to-night——"

"Madam, if I go, I go alone."

She nodded:

"I'm sorry, Major; but if you don't go, the drawing-room floor says she will leave—and others in the house are getting restless—and we cannot afford the loss."

The Major pondered upon the problem long.

"Yes," he said, "the drawing-room floor is serious—she is a woman of weight."

The landlady tittered.

But the daughter frowned her to order, and said, somewhat to the point:

"She pays her way handsomely."

The Major bowed and withdrew.

He sang, *Sigh no more, ladies*, as he sallied up the stairs; and to the profound astonishment of the two puzzled women he did not stir from the house that day.

When it was dark, a servant was sent upstairs to the Major to tell him that the cab stood at the door.

"All right!" bawled the Major from within.

An hour passed.

The maid was again sent upstairs to tell the Major that the cab was waiting.

"Let it wait," cried the Major.

Another hour passed.

The cabman became unpleasant, and uttered obscene prose.

The two ladies of the house, in support of each other, now went up the stairs and knocked.

"Come in," cried the Major gaily.

They went in.

He was in bed.

The younger woman burst into tears:

"There is nothing packed, ma," she said.

"What on earth have you been doing all day, Major Modeyne?" gasped the landlady.

"Pitying the lady who has the drawing-room," said the Major.

"Why?"

"I don't know what on earth she will do!" said the Major.

The younger woman bridled, sniffingly:

"She won't do anything," she said hotly.

"Ah," said the Major—"just like me—just like me."

"Is it?" she said testily. "Well, we shall see. The cab has been waiting for you for two hours."

"Most patient cabman!" said the Major—"and who will pay the cabman, madam?"

"We intend to accompany you and your baggage to that cab *now*," said the young woman.

"That you won't," said the Major—"for I haven't a stitch on me; and here I stay in bed until your extremely tasteless letter of a week ago is formally withdrawn. . . . Good-night, ladies. Allow me to open the door for you——"

He made as though to jump out of bed.

The two women hurriedly left the room.

They went to the drawing-room, knocked and entered, sat down on chairs and wept bitterly.

The stout lady of that realm went and held their hands; soothed them; and heard their story out.

"Wha—what are we to do, madam?" said they.

The stout lady laughed until the tears came.

"Well, you two women can't lead a naked man into a cab," said she; "I should love to see it, but I'm afraid you will never do it."

They began to weep again.

The old lady grew impatient.

"Leave the man alone," said she.

And she added, blowing her nose:

"I could have loved that creature."

Indeed, Major Modeyne was always the gentleman—even at bay with the Inevitable.

CHAPTER XXIV

Which tells, with quite Unnecessary Frankness, of what chanced at the Tavern of "The Cock and Bull" *in Fleet Street*

In the dining-room of *The Cock and Bull* was laughter, and the clink of glasses, and some hiccup—for the dinner was long since at an end, and the guests held much wine—not wholly without giddiness and the confusion of tongues. There was more than a hint of Babel.

It was the feast of Saint Valentine's Day, and the commercial gentlemen, fore-gathered there, made the sentiment at *The Cock and Bull* this night sacred to the Ladies.

Major Modeyne, being in the chair, sat at the head of the table; and a-down it, along both sides, were city men; and at the end of all the poetic, sallow, and vague-eyed landlord of the tavern, who, so repute wagged a whispering tongue, had not been above taking his Double First at Oxford—a vague prize to your ordinary mortal that savours of the mysteries of Eleusis and a full hand of trumps at the gaming-table of life, though 'tis said to be useless enough, being of the nature of fireworks in the grey fastnesses of the skull. There's something of the awesome in big names. However that may be, our landlord was a gloomy fellow in his cups, and ran to latinities, so that the wit came mostly from the head, where was the Authority of the Chair—indeed, Modeyne had repartee so long as he could keep an eyelid up, though fragments of it had served the world of badinage before.

The debauch being dedicate to the ladies, then, our gloomy landlord raised the glass to the respectable sentiment of *Sweethearts and Wives.*

And, the toast being drunk, as indeed was the company, the Chair, as an excuse to empty the glasses again, gave the toast of retort, *Other Fellows' Sweethearts and Wives*—the hiccup which was the full-stop to the Major's waggery being drowned in a shout of laughter and the noisy drinking of the toast. Indeed, they stood up to it, one foot on chair and one on table, giving it with musical honours, though, as the draper, a fellow of polygamous sentiments from his own showing, said:

"This standing on chairs displayed a childlike confidence in the design of creation and man's destiny under all conditions to

maintain the upright position on but two legs, that would have done credit to a Sunday-school teacher."

He himself, reeling at his own dazzling elevation, grasped the great lustre chandelier that depended from the ceiling, which, flaring magnificently, gave way with him, so that he fell with it amongst the wine-glasses ; and whilst they plucked splinters of broken glass from the lower end of him, he whimsically owned his contrition at having tempted Providence by not sitting anchored to the good seat that had been assigned to him. Still, said he, commerce must follow the army ; and the Major had the habit of forlorn hopes, having acquired in youth and on the tented field the taste for " withering fires " and " bloody engagements "—he said this with all apologies—hiccup—to any churchwardens who might be present—hiccup—but he *meant* bloody engagements.

As a fact, these commercial gentlemen adored the army and navy—never were such fire-eaters as they. A tale of carnage, as long as the old flag came out a-top, thrilled them and roused their maddest enthusiasms. They thundered applause upon the heels of the bloodthirsty sentiment. They were ready to die, so they averred hiccuping, in their very cups for the divine right of their king and the infallibility of the upper classes. Was never such service of devotion as they swore to the " Thin Red Line " and the " Handy Man." Gods, it made the blood leap to hear them—they were thirsting for self-sacrifice—each one of them. Indeed for the dear old flag they were prepared to fling away Christianity—riches—suburban villa—happy home—everything. The glasses leaped to the thunder of their emotions.

Here, indeed, were they all áristocrat—hating the democracy with a bitter hatred. The lord mayor's coach drove at the slow trot through all their varied ambitions, its golden caparisoned horses making it to glitter a fixed star to their designs, a guide to their hopes—and, from that, the ultimate step into the peerage, riches, powdered footmen, and marble halls. It was all tucked away tight behind the bloodshot eyes, in their secret imaginations. When they went to bed at night, took off their trousers, and blew out the light, the dream of these things passed in pageant along the top of their foot-rails. To be a Nob—so they put it with vulgar lip, when confessing to their own souls—that was the Ultimate Thing. They believed in their God—a little hesitantly on occasions ; but their belief knew no wavering in the divine inspiration of the statesmanship of the House of Lords.

The polygamous draper but echoed the general sentiment when he condemned the vulgarity of the masses.

The British workman had his whole contempt—(thus he delivered himself)—the British workman did as little as he could, and got a ridiculously high wage that was so much outside his needs that he was always more or less drunk—hiccup—gen'rally more—hiccup—in the public-house—hiccup hiccup—and the—gin-palace. What did these gorgeous and brightly illuminated drinking-saloons that shone in the darkness of the darkest street mean but the widespread overpayment of the working-man and

his consequently seeking in these costly pleasure-houses of vice, when his so-called day's work was done, his illicit—hiccup—illicit joys.

Long and sustained applause.

"Hee-haw!" cooed the Major. "Too-ra-loora-lay."

The draper turned upon him:

"Yer can't get over it, sir—hiccup—*there* it is." He swept his hand towards the landlord: "There's your workman—hiccup—and there's your public-house"—he swept his hand to the Major.

The Major rapped upon the table:

"Order! order!" cried he—"the chairman is *not* a public-house."

He giggled, and titters turned to laughter.

The erotic draper sat down:

"The army keeps a-jumpin' on the bloomin' chest of commerce to-night," said he, "until I forget—hiccup—forget my intentions."

The Major begged to remind the gentleman that this was not a Labour night, but the Feast of St. Valentine, when even the greyest sparrows skipped amorous with love's delight along the homely necessary waterspout.

The draper apologized handsomely; and they drank together.

The draper was now called upon, as a man of taste in the matter, to make the speech of the evening: The Ladies—Lovely Woman.

He arose and spoke.

He apologized for having disturbed the harmony of the evening by his earlier essay, but the British workman was the thorn in his side——

A waggish commercial person, an atheistic upholsterer and something of a rake, called out that they had all understood that it was the splinter of a sherry glass that had been drawn from the wound.

The Major rose and called for order—their honest draper only used a metaphor, a So-to-Speak—besides, the splinter of glass had not been removed from the gentleman's side, nor by any stretch of the imagination nor tribute to delicacy could it be called his side. The affair of the wine-glass, and therefore all reference to it, must be avoided—it was a painful subject, and the incident was now closed.

"Haw-haw!" guffawed the rakish upholsterer. "But the wound ain't—it was our honest draper that re-opened the wound."

The Major's eyes twinkled:

"Order, order," cried he. "The wound, sir, and the incident are now closed. The subject before the house is Lovely Woman."

He sat down.

The draper licked his lips sullenly, and proceeded.

"Gentlemen," said he, and he thrust his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, raising a drowsy eyebrow—"woman was once content to *be*. Hiccup. To trip through the banquet of existence appealing to man as the Beautiful; and, being beautiful, to be loved—to sit on the knees of man and kiss him kisses. She is no longer content. Woman has become a danger—a

menace—hiccup—a pronounced menace. Damn this hiccup! Woman, I say, has become a menace to the State. Woman is no longer content to be beautiful—she has come out into the noisy thoroughfare of life and demands liberty to win her own career, and to clean up that thoroughfare. I call it unwomanly. Yet the men, like the asses they are—hiccup—are marrying them. But, you know, I'm against blue-stockings——"

"Order!" cried the Major—"the ladies' underclothes are out of order."

The draper licked his lips and blinked:

"I withdraw the stockings," said he—"fancy, you and me, gentlemen, mating with a female who knows as much as we do—fancy the want of 'armony there must be in the house where the lady is our equal in intelligence and in the—all the other things that go to make up a man's natural superiority—hiccup. . . . I'm against this Pallas Athene business myself—the woman putting on the blooming helmet and coming out and criticising conduct. It's indelicate. It takes the bloom off the peach of her modesty. Not, mind you, that I'm one as plumps too solid for modesty. Not at all. I don't go nap on modesty. For my part, I like a woman who can take her buss like a live thing—as women were meant by God's design so to do. A woman who draws the line at honest kissing is no woman at all—and is of the nature of a public nuisance. A woman who is cold-blooded enough to write sonnets to her love when she might be sitting on his knees and loving her love is committing an offence against her Original Intention—which is a sin against nature. I ask you, then, gentlemen, to fill your glasses and drown Modesty. . . ."

CHAPTER XXV

Wherein the Major takes to his Bed

The winter dawdled late in the city.

Saint Valentine went out into the darkness of the night, with silent feet muffled in a heavy fall of snow.

And Major Modeyne went with him.

They brought him home in the early morning, dead and icy cold, and laid him upon his bed ; and when they were gone Betty sat by the still figure and stroked the chill hand that had done intentional ill to none ; in such strange manner she tasted for the first time the bitterness of death—in such sorry fashion the poor tattered remains of her childhood fell from her, sitting there, listening for the deep mystic significance of the eternal slaying that is a part of the eternal life. . . .

Betty, as by pronounced habit, was to suffer for it.

A jury had to sit upon the tragedy ; and the coroner, embarrassedly enough, had to rake up the details that were called the life of the poor broken man that lay silent in death, unheeding and unprotesting and unashamed. Modeyne's hand had always fallen heaviest upon the small child from whom his thin will would have the most flinched as to the giving of pain. His death, that should have closed the book of the record of the child's struggles against the public washing of the linen of his sordid details of life, was instead a new whip wherewith she was scourged—the manner of it was the very event that compelled the uncovering of all those little tragedies which the proud child had so courageously hushed under the dignity of her silence.

It was made clear by the sworn evidence that the Major had wandered to the great flight of steps on which he was found, that he had taken off his boots to prevent the waking of his landlady, that he had climbed a few of the steps in the darkness, and lain down, under the delusion that he was in bed, and had slept into death, the white snow weaving his winding-sheet.

Then it came out that he had sat late at a festive orgy in the rooms of *The Cock and Bull* tavern in Fleet Street, and had left the place, like most of the others, somewhat vague as to his destination.

It also came out that he was some sort of agent for the tavern,

which had wine-merchandise in its connection ; but this seems to have become, in the Major's case, but a sleeping partnership—his chief office having been an ornate one—to attract the city loungers to the place by the exercise of his genial and ready fancy and his pleasant friendship, which was wholly untainted with the ignoble thing called snobbery. The very waiters felt in him a personal loss. Yet he had not had the means to be prodigal of anything but his whimsical tongue.

It was also hinted that the dead man was highly connected—but the magnificent in their high places kept a frigid silence that showed a dogged decision to bear their loss unflinchingly.

Indeed, on the evening of the day on which the dead man was put to his rest for the last time by the silent girl and the handsome youth who had so often shared the task in the small hours of the morning when the unknowing world snored and slept, it was, truth to say, a somewhat vulgar little knot of city men that sat round the table of *The Cock and Bull* tavern and passed a silk hat round about to collect the little sum that one of them was deputed to take to the girl herself with a vote of their respect and affection for a dead friend and as true a gentleman as any into whom the good God had put good wine.

CHAPTER XXVI

Wherein Tom Folly blunders along in his Self-centred Gig—and drags a Dainty Little Lady's Skirts into the Wheel

ANTHONY fretted at the death of the Major—fretted at the publicity—fretted at the time of the man's dying, and the manner; for he had decided to appeal to Betty not to spoil Noll's prospects, now so suddenly brightening, by getting him entangled in a childish engagement. But Modeyne's death made it wholly indecent to approach the already so indecent subject for some time; made it in any case the more difficult to broach at all; made it also more urgent that it should be approached. And, to fret the will with further indecision, Anthony, his eyes intent upon the pale girl in the simple black gown, and balked by the strange gravity that had settled upon the slim dainty figure, perceived the exquisite approach, the delicate fragrance and most subtle atmosphere of the coming of womanhood—an atmosphere which made it doubly difficult for him to commit himself to putting into the brutality of speech what cost him shame even in the thinking.

Had he only taken Caroline into his scheme, he would not have blundered thus clumsily into a brutality; but he did not—and, with his fatal capacity for not leaving well alone, fretting impatiently through the keen bitter winds of March and the early days of April, he at last brought himself to the pitch of seeing the girl alone and making his appeal.

When Anthony knocked at the door and entered her room, she arose, with a smile, to greet him; and he found himself mute.

She was so comely, this slender girl of fifteen years, so debonair—as is meet and fit in the young of the most beautiful of all created things. The brown hair, tied with a ribbon at the nape of the white neck, showed the great beauty of the shapely head; and he knew that the soul within the delicate body was the most mystically beautiful of all. He realized that the slightest cruelty would leave harsh scars. Yet he did not withhold himself from the brutalities.

She would have made him at ease so prettily; and he decided to be blunt and strike at once, if he would say what he had come to say.

"Betty," said he, "I have come to say a thing which it hurts me to the quick to say; which of course must wound you even more. Don't make it an added bitterness to me by being too much your dainty self—rather be unpleasant—if you can."

The light went out of the trustful grey eyes; the smile flickered out and slowly left the pure face. The slender hands trembled a little—the large eyelids fell, and she bowed her comely head. She wondered what new agony lay in store for her.

Thus she stood and said never a word. Just one little movement—the interlacing of the slender fingers together before her—it hid the trembling of the white hands—and she prepared to meet what cut of the lash should fall, in silent dignity.

Anthony was taken up with his own difficulty,—yet, as he spoke, the picture of the girl's humiliation slowly bit into his imagination.

"Betty," he said, "I do not know whether you are aware of it, but there are only two people between Noll, through his mother, and Lord Wyntwarde of Cavil. . . ." The lash cut deep, but he was too engrossed in his object to see the girl's courage. "Lord Wyntwarde is, frankly, somewhat of a brute—capricious, full of whims. He has, after ignoring the boy from his birth, suddenly expressed a wish that Noll should go to Oxford, a wish also to provide a career for him—such as—I—cannot give him. . . . He has made, as one of his conditions, a most binding proviso that Noll shall not marry without his consent, nor outside his set——"

The girl spake no smallest word, gave no sign.

Anthony went on:

"I am going to ask you not to spoil Noll's career——"

The words cut into the girl's very flesh; but she said not a word.

Anthony blundered on, brutally unconscious of the simple urgent fact that the girl had not wanted to spoil the lad's career, that she was in no way on her defence—that he was committing himself to the base insolence, the most ignoble insolence of which we can be guilty, of the lie that presumes the accusation of the innocent. It were as though indifferent cutlery should beg tempered steel to try and be tempered steel.

"You are very beautiful," he said—"you probably do not realize how beautiful. And I am going to appeal to you not to allow Noll to get engaged to you in case he should wish it—for it would be folly in me to pretend that I don't see that he has a boy's love for you, which, if other things were different, God knows would be the happiest thing for him."

So he blundered on, excusing the girl from his own insolences; even making all allowances for her out of the deeps of his self-sufficiency.

Betty's fingers remained tight clasped before her—her head bowed down—but she made no slightest movement, standing deathly still.

And Anthony, his false step irretrievably made, realized slowly that he had done a brutal and foolish thing; saw perhaps even more clearly that he had won a success; but, rebuffed by the girl's

silence at last, and embarrassed and not without a suspicion of shame, he slowly retired from the room.

The door closed upon him.

The girl was left utterly alone.

A hot flush had burnt into her face.

She stretched out her hand and with difficulty reached the mantel.

They had now turned even her deep love for this youth, the only being left to her, into a thing to bring her shame. It was the whip of scorpions.

She had stood and taken the lashes upon her slender shoulders ; but at last the hellish device that invented the punishment of the solitary cell wrung from her lips a pathetic little moan.

CHAPTER XXVII

Wherein a Dainty Little Lady, looking out of the Window of a Shabby Home at a Shabbier Destiny, joins the Streaming Crowd whose Faces pass in the Street, drifting towards the Strange Riot of Living

For the first time, Betty reeled beneath the buffets of her destiny —for a moment the world swung away from before her feet—she clutched the mantel, or would have fallen.

Passing her slender hand over her head, uttering a pitiful little moan, with the courage of her blood she stood at gaze with the cruelty—faced it—and overcame it. . . .

Practising her wonted and deliberate caution, she considered her next move ; before the dusk had taken possession of the town she was dressed for walking ; she went out to the shops to buy some needful frills and stuff ; she brought the package home with her, and locked herself into her room.

It had come to her that morning, indeed she had been at work upon the problem but a few hours before this last blow had been struck at her, that she must still further narrow her narrow expenditure.

All that night Betty sewed, her deft fingers lengthening one of her gowns.

When she had done, the chill dawn was stealing up the smoky heavens.

She put out the lamp, and packed.

The memories would come crowding, treading on each other's heels importunately. Betty remembered only the happinesses ; and these, because they made her lip tremble, she put from her with stern and dogged fortitude, bending her wits only on the details of her coming actions, on the things she must do ; and it was thus that, when the time came, every move she made fitted into its calculated place with appointed precision, and she was prepared for every event before it nudged at her attention.

The sun was well up, and yawning housemaids clumsily astir, before she had put away her last little belongings in the big black trunk. Even at her tender years she had learnt in the harsh school of experience the value that the world sets upon the having of possessions, and the credit that landlords give to such as show responsible luggage.

Wisdom is thrust upon some at sixteen.

The room looked sadly desolate when she had put away the last of her small belongings ; and it was with a strenuous effort that she sat down before the mirror and gathered up and coiled her nut-brown hair about her head for the first time. She stared wide-eyed at the years it added to her age.

She dressed herself in her lengthened gown ; put on her hat and jacket. When she was finished she stood before the glass a woman—and a very beautiful woman.

Yet her brows clouded—at the dread that she looked too young!

She wrote a short note to her landlady to say she might be away all day ; stole stealthily on to the landing to see that there was no one about ; locked her door ; put the key in her pocket ; ran down the stairs ; and let herself out into the street. . . .

All day she spent in the purlieus of Soho, in the search for a room ; and it was near upon nightfall when she made a choice.

When darkness had come down upon the street, Betty drove up to the door of her old home in a cab ; she took the hungry tatterdemalion of a cabman upstairs for her baggage ; and, whilst the shabby fellow was getting it down and on to the cab, she herself sought out the landlady in her little office. She put the money for her rooms into the hands of the amazed woman, tried to tell her that she was going away, and broke down into a hoarse murmur.

"Go-ing away ?" gasped the good creature.

Betty squeezed the old body's hand. She could say nothing.

"Miss Betty," said the other—"you mustn't go away. . . . What will the house be without you ? Pay when you can, my dear——"

But the girl shook her head sadly. She was glad to find that they would only think she had left for lack of means.

The old woman patted her shoulder, thrust back the money into her purse, and said that nothing on God's earth would prevail on her to touch it. She kissed the unhappy girl ; and Betty, making a stern effort to check her sobs, stood up, kissed the old face on each cheek, stepped out into the night, and was gone. . . .

Noll had knocked impatiently at the locked door twice that day, and now as the darkness fell, seeing the door open, he leaped up the stairs, calling Betty by name ; sprang through the open door ; and came to a sudden halt, bewildered to find the room deserted and dismantled.

He turned roughly to the landlady's daughter, who stood at the window weeping.

"Where is Miss Modeyne ?" he asked hoarsely.

"Gone," sobbed the girl.

"Where ?"

She shook her head :

"No one knows, Mr. Noll."

Noll went to the little bed, flung himself down beside it, and sobbed like a child. . . .

The landlady's daughter slipped a-tiptoe from the room and brought down the young fellow's mother.

Caroline went and seated herself on the bed beside the lad, and stroked the handsome head with her gentle fingers :

"Ah, Noll," said she—"so you too are to taste the bitters of life early !"

The young fellow stayed by the bed all night, and would not be comforted.

And Caroline most wisely stayed with him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Wherein Dawning Womanhood whispers that Dolls are Dolls

Betty, listless and lonely, and in hiding, had not been long in her new-found attic when she won the wan smile of a little old faded lady who lived in the room below.

They met on the stairs; and a smile bred a smile. A formal invitation to tea from the little old faded lady followed. The little scented note bore the signature of Flora Jennyns. . . .

When Betty entered the room, and shut the door, she shut out half a century.

Miss Flora Jennyns, rustling in full-skirted silks, had the atmosphere of crinolines round and about her; the room was fresh and sweet, and fragrantly quaint and stilted, and of the early Victorian years.

Into the armchair before the fire where she was used to sit, Betty made the little lady now go; and the girl went and sat on a footstool by her knees and talked to her, and entered into the dainty faded mind.

She saw, with a little smile, that Miss Flora Jennyns at once fell into a little pose—it was the faded reflection of a portrait that hung on the wall—the picture of a graceful simple young woman who leaned her chin on a pretty slender hand, as she sat wrapt in dreams of sweet sentiment; and slowly, from out the faded lines of the old face and head and pose, there came to her the features and pose, modest and virginal, of the portrait.

Whilst Betty made tea for her, she learnt that the little old Catholic lady had been a literary success in her youth—a one-time vogue, who was now fading away in the heroic pride of a gentlewoman's penury—uncomplaining—amidst a sordid world and harsh needs dreaming of romance that had walked in crinolines—living in a withered garden where were but fragrant fallen leaves. . . .

From that day, the little Miss Flora's smile became more frequent; and from Betty's attic the bleak loneliness lifted and went out; for, though the vasty gulf of age divided them (youth and old age can only love each other as in a dream, vaguely), the girl did not find so much time for brooding—she had found a something to mother. . . .

Betty, looking out of her attic window, began to notice that, as twilight fell, a little old gentleman would slowly pace the street opposite; and the little faded old lady, dressed for the road, would go out and meet him, and, after old-world courtesies exchanged between them, she would take his proffered arm and so together they would take their little walk abroad.

Betty came to know him, with a smile, as the Man of Pallid Ideals.

He would bring Miss Flora to the door always; ring the bell for her; and with elaborate bow and hat in hand, there take leave of her. Nearer to the lady's room he never ventured, neither being provided with a chaperon. . . .

Betty one day taxed Miss Flora with the charge that she was in love—and loved a poet. And the little withered waxen cheeks blushed.

"You shall read his poems, my dear," she said; and, rising, she went to a little sandal-wood box, opened the lock with an ornate little key, and, raising the lid, let out the scent of the lavender in which was laid a little book of verse amidst other treasures.

Miss Flora handed the little volume to Betty; and she, begging her to leave the box open, said she would only read the precious book in that room.

Miss Flora kissed her, and went back to her chair.

Betty, sitting in the window in the waning light, learnt from the precious volume that the poet's name was Cartel de Maungy; and opening the book she found written upon every leaf in tuneful verse the self-revelation of the man, the poet of faded ideals, as his race had been before him—his grandsire had gone to the guillotine for a well-turned sonnet about something that did not matter. On every page was the tale of his placid devotion; his adoration of his Flora—always from a seemly distance; his vows that they should ever move in the ideal; that the touch of his lips upon her fingers is sweet marriage enough for him; in his measured singing of jewelled queens and sapphire nights and pearly dusk he holds her finger-tips reverently and but for the moment, and that only in the distant and proper measure of the gavotte or the like stately trippings to the whispered music of viol and lute and harpsichord—throughout was no coarse bucolic love-embrace. Thus the slender verse sounded its tender music until there was almost shame in the kiss that is kissed upon the mouth.

The little old faded lady was possessed of an academic and dainty old-world Papist faith that æsthetically touched Betty's sense of beauty.

The child had grown up without any kind of formal religious instruction—had picked up from the air, and from straying truths in the air, her sweet concept of life. The pure metal of her quick, alert and vigorous understanding required but little hammering. Only with the lad Noll had come unrest and questioning.

Major Modeyne had drifted from his Church—indeed, Betty

remembered well a very severe fit of coughing that had overcome him in answer to an early childish demand of hers during a thunderstorm as to what God could find to do all day in heaven —coughing which became almost an apoplectic fit when, being unanswered, she concluded airily that the drab intercourse with pious people and the lack of good wholesome entertainment excused these outbursts of anger and violence, and no doubt led to the making of these noises and other such-like unpleasantnesses.

Betty, with the strange reserve that covered all her deepest thinking, whispered no hint of her own birth in the same faith to the old lady ; she tried instead to win from the beautiful and pure and faded mind of Miss Flora some conception of God and the mysteries—only to find the little old lady's concept, for all the disguises of her delicate mind, exceedingly crude and vague—that, in fact, she had absolutely no concept at all. She saw that it was the wide compassion of the mystic Man of Sorrows that gave, as to most Papists, the exquisite faith in their mysteries. Yet, like the most orthodox, she spoke of the old and the new dispensation —God then had not known His own mind. Puzzled with the great fact that God and Son were absolutely destructive of each other—one the God of War, the other the God of Peace—one the God of Vengeance, demanding Punishment, the other the God of Mercy, offering Forgiveness ; the one choosing an indifferent race as a chosen people, the other rejecting that race ; the book of the laws of the one obliterating the book of the laws of the other—the girl had awakened from her childhood and realized that she had eaten of the fruit of knowledge, and that before the judgment-seat of that knowledge the God of her childhood stood convicted of the very sins, from killing downwards, for which that same God had condemned man to eternal punishments ; and, with the true instinct for justice and for the humanities, she forthwith rejected the God and gave all her affection to the Christ, who had thwarted, and by thwarting had confessed the injustice of God.

And now, having so decided, and being in sight of a calm harbour of refuge, she found herself baffled with the fury of the factions that professed the Christ. The symbolism and the beauty of the Papist section beckoned her to Rome ; but the genius of the child saw all things in the large, and was not to be led aside by details —she was repelled by the contradictions of its belief that at one turn appealed to reason, at the next rejected reason ; repelled by its un-Christliness, repelled by the submission of the conscience to its priesthood, repelled by its condemnation of all outside its gates, repelled by its preposterous claims—by its belief in the real presence of the Christ in the wine and wafer of its sacraments.

She had only that day come upon a copy of the Cautels, and as she read the cautions to priests, after partaking of the sacraments, that they should not wash their mouths or spit before breaking their fast in case of ejecting the body of Christ in their spittle or vomit, she was stung with shame that such puerile things should be expected of her intelligence—it were as though she had been struck across the face with a whip. The strong blood of the

master race leaped in her veins, and she found herself unable to believe that the toys which had amused her infancy were really alive.

To all the pettiness of the little petty quarrels that were galling the dignity of the age, her clear intellect was too contemptuous to give more than a passing thought. The symbols and the forms, the chief source of the wrangles and squabblings, were no trouble to her, had the things on which they were founded been deep and large with truth. With the greyness of mind, that made of these things a sin, she had no more sympathy than with the narrowness of head that made of them an important part of life. . . .

She had wandered one day into a Quakers' meeting-house—had been struck with the deep religious atmosphere, the far deeper mysticism than that of her own Church, for all its splendid forms and ceremonial and great beauty of service. She had not felt her reason sullied by the interposition of any gross human body between the Christ and her nobility. She had felt the wondrous dignity of the simple service, in spite of the greyness.

She had read of late a novel, a vulgar stupid book, in which a child brought up by an agnostic is made to commit suicide because it cannot believe in a hereafter—in hell. Her reason revolted at the shabby trick, for she saw that no child would commit suicide because there was not a hell; but rather because there was—indeed, she herself remembered that she had suffered torments at night and had wept until her nerves were shaken for fear of hell, and out of compassion for the poor lost souls—nay, had reeled before the brutality that had created these poor souls only to fling them to such hellish predestined doom for all eternity. This literary trash roused her to the feeble foundations of sand on which much so-called religious life is built—especially the religious side of women. For the book had a wide sale.

Creeds are an affair of race. They that are of a master race will hold a master creed—they that are of a sloven race will bow to sloven gods. It is the attribute of a slave people to pay homage from fear. This girl was of the master peoples. It was impossible for her to enslave her mind or her body or her soul with the blind credulities. She was of the mighty race that has bred the Protestors. With the passing of her childhood she put away the toys of the childhood of the world. In no bitter or harsh temper, but with affection and sadness she put them away—and took a deeper breath of life.

In monastic cells and blind gropings in dark corners where life is a denial, and in the shirking of contradictions, very God is not to be found; but out in the free fresh air of the great world. The truth cannot lie.

The girl roused in the dusk of the dying day and took the beautiful image of the Mary, and went down with it to the little old faded lady's room, and set it upon the mantel there, that it might bring happiness to one whose sweet mind had not passed beyond these things.

And she, little and old and faded, seated before the fire, smiled

when the girl had set above her hearth the emblem of her outworn creed. When the tall slender girl went and sat down beside the flounced and emaciated old knees a pathetically weary old hand was stretched out and rested on the brown hair.

"Mother of God," sighed the withered lips, "I am so glad not to be alone."

As the girl parted from her image of the Mary, she left the childhood of her intellect behind her.

And from that day, Betty raised her frank honest eyes to the facts and verities of the live world about her, and, as she nearest might, fearlessly and cheerfully lived her own sweet life foot to foot and eye to eye with the mystic realities of her appointed destiny, mistaking guesses for truth never.

For it is through the humanities alone, be ye sure of this, that we may touch the hem of the garment of God.

CHAPTER XXIX

Wherein Mr. Pompey Malahide loses his Breath in the Midst of a Boast

Mr. Pompey Malahide, man of considerable wealth as he had been for years, was now grown so rich that he scarcely knew whether each fresh venture in which he launched might not be doubling his income by the end of the year.

City people said, awe-struck, that all he touched turned to gold. But they failed to add that he touched nothing that did not hold hidden treasure. As a fact, he ventured only in the exploitation and invention of things of which he had himself felt the lack, which he felt were wanted at large. His shrewd business insight led him simply to traffic in such things as must turn to gold on their very discovery. Whilst the unimaginative followed a garish eyesight to seek fortune at the goldfields, he stayed at home and won wealth from richer lodes. He did not break hard rock for gold ; he made the things that the world had need to buy.

His appetite was but whetted by success.

He was now destined to make such wealth as is only dreamed of in the dingy city offices of imaginative Jews.

Pompey Malahide was on the eve of becoming a millionaire.

Yet was he plagued with discontent.

He was suffering discomfort. Riches alone contained nothing in themselves. He realized that riches were only a power. He, in communion with himself, striding his room, stood himself by the figure of young Bartholomew Doome, his paid servant ; and his vulgarly frank eyes could not rid him of the transparent fact that this other was the master without an effort of his own. This other was the designer—the creator. His own the rude hand that beat out the design. Behind the dry humour and grim smile of the young man was the master wit, a wit always strangely kindly to him, but—tolerant. Whilst in the very act, even whilst he puffed and blew and swaggered and strutted and boasted to the young man of his successes and of his wealth, the warmth ran out of his conceit—he felt that what would have impressed his city friends was but rousing criticism behind those calm eyes that cared no jot for elaborate wealth—eyes that looked upon riches only as a secondary thing.

Pompey Malahide looked at the slender sinewy hands of the young man, and forthwith hid his own short thick hands with their stunted pointed money-getting fingers behind his back. He noticed that where they two entered a place together, all deferred to the youth, whilst they were as rough to himself as he to them. He noticed that Doome spoke with deference to those below him whom he, Pompey, treated to the rougher side of his tongue—noticed, too, that behind the youth's courteous manner was a note of calm authority that his own roughshod ways never caught. He grasped the fact that money had not won him the habit of the great; and he was determined that his girls should have what he himself lacked—this easy and gracious bearing of the master class. His boy was catching some hint of it at Harrow. The girls must acquire it also.

But how?

He consulted Doome.

Doome, frowning upon the difficulties of the problem, decided that these young women must have a young gentlewoman for companion; he said that he would try and find a girl of breeding of their own age; it was full time; the boy Horace was springing up, and would be leaving Harrow at the end of the term; he ought not to be brought up in a different social atmosphere to the girls or he must of necessity drift into another set and grow into contempt of his sisters.

Pompey Malahide nodded many nods.

He approved.

He sighed a portly sigh.

Riches were bringing perplexing burdens. The very spending was a burden. He would have laughed at it all so short a while ago. It was much easier to make wealth than to use it—for a man had only to make money like a tradesman; he had to spend it—like a gentleman.

Heigho!

Pompey Malahide, approached by the leaders of the Opposition, threw in his lot with the party, was put up for one of the city constituencies, and, in the flood of political reaction that swept the country, was elected to the House of Commons by a large majority.

CHAPTER XXX

Wherein Miss Betty Modeyne posts a Letter

Betty, to avoid meeting Noll, had taken her walks abroad in the dusk only ; but the restriction began to fret her will ; and she had besides been compelled to the conclusion that she must add a few shillings a week to her slender means, or she would soon run through her small capital.

She decided to take the loyal Netherby Gomme into her confidence, to put her position before him, and to rely on him to help her in evading Noll and the Baddlesmeres. She hoped, too, that he might get her some post of daily governess or companion to a city family, or some secretarial billet in a city office.

She stole out one evening, and watched the Gommes' house until she felt sure the place was free of visitors.

She tripped up the steps at last, plotting what she would say if, by some chance, Noll should open the door.

When she rang the bell, she was answered by the old lady, who was grimly rejoiced to see her.

Betty put the old lady into a smiling and important mood, almost before the bang of the slammed door had ceased to echo in the gloomy hall, by at once begging her to summon Netherby downstairs to assist them in serious council on a delicate situation.

The grim old woman fussed away, important and bustling.

Netherby came with a smile on his long pale face, but the happy glint was soon gone, its place usurped by something akin to tears in his solemn steadfast eyes, as his melancholy features took on their habitual lugubrious length and gloom, when he sat down to discuss the situation—solemn promises of alliance and secrecy being sworn and given.

He did not dare to tell Betty of the pathetic scenes that he had gone through, in these very rooms, with the youth Noll ; indeed, Betty gave him little opportunity, for she showed no sense of grievance, and passed, as lightly as could be, over the scene with Noll's father ; but Netherby's lips hardened, and showed an unwonted severity during the reserved statement of the details which had driven the girl to flight—he could fill in Anthony's phrases, and build upon the skeleton of his mind, all so unwitting of its own limitations.

But to Betty, the air of this dingy house was cheerful to breathe —there was in its very greyness a note of remembered gaiety— it had sounded as she entered the place, at once she had heard Noll's feet on the stair, in the hall — she was amongst kindly faces.

She was relieved, too, to find that Noll's day was now very fully occupied with work for a tutor. He was to enter at Magdalen as soon as he could go up to Oxford.

She could now extend her hours of freedom and the range of her walks without risk of meeting him. She knew when he would be abroad, and where. During the old lady's absence from the room, it was arranged between Netherby and Betty that Julia was to come and see her in the evenings as often as could be.

But Netherby's keen wits were not deceived by the girl's reservations. He saw full well that she hungered for the slightest news of Noll—hung upon the smallest details.

Before Betty left the house, she was the possessor of a letter of introduction to a Mr. Pompey Malahide, in which her family and connections were recited at a length that, had she known it, would have embarrassed her as much as they were destined to overwhelm the great man—a letter in which she was recommended as an excellent friend and companion to the daughters of that rich personage. This letter that she dropped into the post went under cover to a personal friend of Netherby Gomme's, and bore the address of a certain Bartholomew Doome.

CHAPTER XXXI

Wherein a Great Financier is Satisfied with his Bargain

Betty had dressed herself with elaborate care ; yet she stood before a large shop-window and frowned upon herself. She was fretted with a doubt that she looked too young.

Ah, the quaint goals of the human ! It is ever the itching folly of the young to appear older ; of the old to appear younger.

And the exceeding great beauty that faced the girl in the mirrored world before her troubled her not at all. She was very, very young.

So she turned on dainty heel and called a hansom—to drive her to the elaborate mansion of Mr. Pompey Malahide, who had his gorgeous dwelling amidst the rich who pay extortionately for life in Park Lane. She shrewdly paid this, to her, heavy toll upon her resources, for she knew, her instincts revealed, what stupid people arrive at by mere mathematics and the rebuffs of experience, that a man respects a woman who has the air of rising, Venus-like, armed at all points from a sea of band-boxes.

Indeed, the girl's manner and appearance, following upon the weighty pronouncement of Doome's introduction, dazzled the city man, who rose to meet her, on her announcement by the elaborate footman. Mr. Pompey Malahide had intended to interview her seated at his desk ; but a certain distinction and that air aloof and apart and of another world that baffled him in Doome, baffled him now. He stood up with the sudden and unforeseen intention of trying to be a gentleman. From lack of habit, he missed the trick, and at once fell into the first position for taking an order, and became the deferential shopman.

And, to give him his due, his own dignities, or the crudities that passed with him for such, were banished as at a stroke out of his kindly bulk by the ambition which leaped within him that this winsome young woman might transfer something of her gracious bearing and pretty voice to his own two buxom daughters. The very hope of it set his thick blood sounding bassoon notes of delight in his ears, and the proud vision of it went whirling through his emotions. It were as though he had secured an estimate, and could have the work done at a price.

From the moment the girl entered the room she was sure of the post.

To her astonishment, she found the man vulgar; yet almost his first comment had a strange note of good-taste that as much surprised her:

"Miss Modeyne," said he, "that Mr. Bartholomew Doome should recommend you is alone good enough for me. . . . But"—he hesitated, a little embarrassed, and added with an effort—"I'm a rough man, and I hope I don't make you misunderstand me, but I have two girls, and I want you to be with them and leaven them with your pretty ways; and if you will allow me to do it in my own way, I would rather you did not enter this house as a companion or a governess, for the girls would—take—well, they would take the wrong way with you. If you would enter my house as the daughter of a friend of friends of mine, come for a long visit, I would pay you your fees without its being known to them or anyone, and I think you yourself would be in a better and pleasanter position."

Betty thought over the scheme for a while; her strict code of honour made her consider only the other value—of what she was giving in return.

"Yes," she said—"perhaps it would be best. . . . May I see the—girls, first?"

Pompey Malahide moved eagerly towards the bell, hesitated—came back:

"I'm real glad to think it, Miss Modeyne," said he; "but look here, there's another thing. I don't want any schooling for them. They are as old as you are, the more's the pity—both gals have got their hair up. . . . Ah," he sighed, "you would have been the making of 'em five years ago; you see"—he sighed again, sadly—"they've modelled themselves a bit on me now. . . . Their mother never comes out of her boudoir. But what I was going to say was this: you can tell 'em what's bad manners, and go with them to picture-galleries and show them the good things, can't ye? and all that!"

Betty smiled:

"I think I can do that," she said simply.

He nodded:

"That's right. I like to hear a gal say the name of the fellow who did a picture without lookin' at the catalogue. And all that sort of thing. . . . Make the girls smart, and knock some sense into them. . . . They're as good as gold—real warm-hearted good gals. But they want style. And you can spare them a ton of it—if you'll excuse a rough and rather vulgar fellow tellin' you so."

Betty laughed.

"I think I should like to see the girls now," she said, "before we decide."

"Come along, bless ye," said he, bustling to the door, and walking out first. "Judith!" he bawled—"Mary!"

A girl's voice called back:

"Why do you bawl, father? Aren't there servants enough?"

A door opened, and two young women entered the hall.

They were a couple of handsome girls, with a good swinging swagger of the body, and held themselves aggressively in all the trim comeliness of young womanhood, as though they could pay their way and expected the men to cast a glance that same way. Their full red lips were undisciplined; they were the outward sign of their wills, they would do only what it pleased them to do. No young and comely thing is wholly vulgar; and they were young and comely.

The stout man's bloodshot eyes watched the young girl's face keenly to read what passed on the first impression; but Betty was not easy to read. She turned to him—was touched with the anxious eagerness of his atittude:

"Yes," she said in a low voice—"I will come."

"Girls!" bawled the millionaire—"here is Miss Betty Modeyne, whose father was a friend of a great friend of mine—take her off with you, and introduce her to your mother—she has come to stay for a good long visit, if a soldier's daughter can put up with the dull house of a city man."

The two girls came and kissed Betty, and, taking her by the arm, adored her. The young love the beautiful and the young. . . .

Nevertheless, Betty decided to keep on her little attic; and, making a business visit the excuse, she went away for the afternoon to purchase garments and brought back with her the black dress-basket—that was largely filled with emptiness. But it had a lock upon its emptiness.

Late that afternoon, as the twilight fell, Mr. Pompey Malahide burst in upon Bartholomew Doome, where he sat in the dusk of his studio; the millionaire praised as lavishly as he spent money.

"No," said Doome, "I have never seen her; but I know all about her. . . . There are so few beautiful women."

"By the book," said Mr. Pompey, swelling, "a marchioness, sir—a marchioness. And a chit of a girl, too—ties her very ribbons like a damn blue-blooded countess. . . . I wonder where some women get it!"

Doome rose from his chair languidly, and strolled over to the fussing excited man:

"Lord of advertisements," said he, tapping the chest of the other—"there is a book you do not read—it would baffle you as Bradshaw's railway guide baffles me. That book is called *The Extinct and Dormant Peerage*."

The stout millionaire stared at him with questioning eyes:

"Well?" he asked.

"Well," said Bartholomew Doome—"she comes out of that."

CHAPTER XXXII

Wherein the Gallant Major rises from the Dead

So, for three several months, the summer shone gaily upon the town, and passed away over the edge of the world in happy fashion enough.

And Betty grew to some affection for the kindly rough man who was the clumsy lord of this elaborate house. And out of her liking grew an anxious and increasing fearfulness for the girls.

The rude father, hoping to polish diamonds, had sent the two girls to a smart school at Brighton; and they, for lack of association with his frank honesty of act and speech at home, and rebuffed by the dull stupidity of a dowdy mother who scarcely ever left her own room, and finding themselves balked by the discipline of school, had fallen into the realizing of their desires by crooked ways. Of their father's qualities and open candour, of his frankness of statement, they had only kept an outward semblance that was little better than rudeness and bad manners, but it deceived their father and his blunt honest friends; it was thereby the more dangerous cloak for their intriguing and questionable habits. They had gone to school vulgar and tolerably honest; they had come back with some outward veneer of manners, with much swaggering disdain, the aping of masterfulness, a display of the lordly habit, and with souls utterly corrupt. They had gone to school with rough affection for their father; they had come back filled with critical contempt for him, ashamed of him, and at heart afraid of him—dreading that he should discover that they *were* afraid of him and ashamed of him. The desires of their full red lips were without discipline, and fretted at restraint; and they fed their desires unstintingly and gave encouragement to every whim. They knew enough of the world to recognise at a glance that Betty was above them by habit and by breeding; they soon knew, by results, that her appearance with them anywhere gave them distinction. Their utter lack of all sense of honour embarrassed Betty at every turn. They lied like drudges; and, with the conceit of the weak, they affected an arrogance which they mistook for the habit of the master class, not seeing that they were wholly devoid of the courage which makes fearlessness of the truth the pronounced habit of the master class.

Betty, watching their father with keen eyes, saw that he, too, was strangely baffled.

He, poor man, looking to their old glad affection for him, which had been their girlish return for his large love of them, found instead, upon his hearth, that there were two critical young women in possession ; realized that his rough endearments were coldly received.

He thought, as usual, that the fault was in his own manners.

The house, ordered by these girls in a spirit of lavish extravagance, reeked of wealth.

The young women, innocent of that courtesy to servants which makes of service an honourable act, were at constant and undignified bickering and war with those beneath them ; and as they held always the winning card of dismissal, they never realized that the sullen obedience of the world below stairs was as insulting as open insolence ; they still less realized that these sullen flunkies took revenge in spoliation, and that what remained of deference was a mockery and covert contempt. So it came about that the sneaks amongst the servants held the lower quarters of the house in their hands.

The young women now began to have social aspirations. They had a vague idea that there was some strange pleasure to be got in the mixing with and being seen with those who but gave them chill encouragement to friendship. But as it so chanced, their ambition for they knew not quite what, was fed by the sudden eagerness of women of high social position to trespass on the broad pages and in the social gossip of the columns of the widely read newspaper which Pompey Malahide held at his beck and will—a newspaper which diffused raucous opinions and created the thoughts of millions throughout the country. The girls found themselves courted. Their arrogance grew, and their strut and swagger increased. Malahide dined at great houses.

With the master-will of Doome to advise him, Malahide now found his position still further strengthened by the alliance with and friendship of his boy Horace, who had left Harrow and was going up to Oxford. His baffled affection for his girls turned to a passionate pride in his handsome son ; and the boy, frank, honest, golden, gay, debonair, returned the old man's affection, drilled him in the subtleties with gentleness, and watched over his father like a father.

The young fellow, with an astuteness that promised well for the rise of his house, was spending the summer with a Magdalen undergraduate, an old Harrow schoolfellow—a young lord whose father was in the Cabinet ; in fact, Horace, with airy cheerfulness, was cementing friendships that might be of value to his father in the political life which he was contemplating for himself, and later on for his son.

The millionaire hungered for the lad ; and, in his absence, he poured into Betty's ears all his hopes for him, his pride in him, his affection for him.

And it was good to see that his pride in the lad's aristocratic

ways was wholly undamped by any suspicion that the boy despised him—whereas with his girls he felt their despisings at every turn.

Betty had hoped, for his father's sake, that the youth would come home for a few days before his term began at Oxford ; but when he came she endured her severest trial.

Horace Malahide, fresh from the society of well-bred people, at once found himself at ease with Betty. His bright wit, his airy love of life, his frank ways, his affection and his care for his father, his patience and his delicacy in correcting him, won the esteem of the girl. And she, for a day or so, not knowing the attraction of her own beauty, enjoyed his companionship.

She realized, all at once, that he was ignoring his sisters. She found it impossible to withdraw herself from the position. Her sudden avoidances of him inflamed the youth's desire for her companionship. He became a trial to her.

Then came letters sad with sighs. How the young dogs all take to the same water !

She found a fragment of the poetic pinned to her dressing-table, in which fragment was much rhyming of Modeyne with "*I ween*," and tributes to "*dainty shoulders chill, and cruel with disdainings keen*," and complaints of "*ignorings of worship that any beauty who, less proud of mien, had been, must surely needs have seen.*"

The dictionary had been ransacked for rhymes.

The lad was in the euphemistic stage of poetic debauchery ; and Betty could never abide indifferent verse. He chose the surest way to this very desert of ignorings and shoulders chill and the like disdainings. The devil was in it for the lad all through.

So the poetic bugling sounded the trump of his rejection.

He went up to Oxford ; and for close upon three days was well-nigh disconsolate.

The lad's admiration, most unwitting of it, did the girl a sad disservice.

The unspoken verdict of their modish brother, in preferring this girl's society to theirs, roused the ill-will of his neglected sisters ; and the two young women, whilst their full red lips kissed Betty good-morning as sweetly as was their wont, took to tittle-tattling against her.

The tittle-tattle bred further tittle-tattle, unloosed suggestive and insinuating tongues, and at last Dame Gossip bumped up, giggling, against the doors of *The Cock and Bull* in Fleet Street.

The tavern vomited its secret.

The ghost of Major Modeyne arose from the dead and walked ; and was seen in Park Lane.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Which has to do with one of those Emotional Crises that change the Whole Tenor of a Man's Political Convictions

The millionaire was in the most hearty of good moods—could not sit still in his office—came home and could not sit still in his home. He tramped his house ; was jocularly familiar with the servants ; slapped the housemaids on the back ; gave them half-sovereigns ; twitted them about lovers ; chaffed the shocked footman ; dug the solemn butler Pontefract in the waistband ; punched him in the chest and wind, the astounded servant clumsily guarding the threatened parts ; and told him crude stories.

He told every separate servant of his household, as he had told every separate clerk in his offices on one pretext or other during the morning, that he was to be the guest of honour at a big banquet together with the Marquis of Malahide—" the head of our family, sir."

Mr. Pompey Malahide had always thanked Providence for his own cunning, for his energy, and, to a certain extent, for his luck —or for that small portion of good chance that remained from all successes after the results of his own keen foresight had been deducted, which, to put it fairly, was little enough. But whilst he felt that he himself shared with Providence not a little of his own credit, there was one thing which he frankly set down generously and without reserve of smallest kind to the gods—that he had been born with a name that was in the peerage.

The father of Pompey, when he had left the ancestral calling of rat-catcher on the Lincolnshire estates of the old Marquis of Malahide and had come up to London town to seek his fortune, had taken the name of the man for whom he had had the keenest admiration, whilst to his son he had given in lieu of dedication to the saints the name of the dog which had brought him most honour at the local tavern. And by consequence, the son of the rat-catcher, now grown to fortune, had always felt a kinship between himself and the living marquis, whose bluff sailor ways and jovial bearing made him the idol of the populace.

Indeed, a print of the great man's portrait was the most aggressive decoration in the house—topped by a gilt coronet and flanked,

as it was, by all the prints of the great man's ancestors that the art-dealers could find for him or foist upon him—to which central figure of importance he would always refer as "the head of our house, sir!"

That night, Pompey Malahide sat at the banquet, and as he sat he received a whispered communication from a member of the Cabinet at his right hand that made his face to shine, gorgeous, boisterously glorified.

And more—when the guests had risen, it made him commit the mistake which sent titters through the city and laughter through the fashionable clubs for many a day; and this he did from sheer joyousness of heart, yet, so intoxicated was he with his magnificence that city gossips were almost justified in setting it down to the full body of the wine.

The guests being risen then, and grouping into tattling knots, our Pompey made his way, exultant, to the group that held the jovial figure of the sailor-marquis.

"My lord," said he—"my name is Malahide—Pompey Malahide. My family is—I—er—believe, in some remote way connected with your lordship's."

After the silence that fell, all eyes seeking the twinkling eyes of the sailor-marquis, our Pompey received his wound.

"Likely enough!" roared the admiral, wringing the fat fingers of the exultant Pompey in his treacherous grip—"likely enough!" And his lordship, being mellow with wine, and in a fine rollicking humour, had slapped him a rousing buffet upon the shoulder so that our Pompey coughed, and with a big jolly laugh the nobleman blandly accepted the likelihood.

"Ah, yes—likely enough!" he cried. "The old lord was a damned rogue amongst the women!"

The Malahides were all hail-fellow thus.

The jesting answer, whilst it had tickled, had not a little shocked some that stood near, and, perhaps not the least, the sense of delicacy of the claimant.

A chill aloofness might have made the wounded man adore the idol more. What tyrannies will we not suffer from the gods! But to be overwhelmed in city humour had smitten our Pompey in his most sensitive parts.

All that night Pompey Malahide knew no sleep. And he arose in the early morning ashamed and sorely wounded. It had been a shabby enough blow, but he had put himself in the way of a drunken fellow's fisticuff. . . .

Up he got as soon as it was daylight, kicked his heels out of bed, and, having dressed, ranged restlessly about the house; and it thus chanced that one of his daughters, Judith, early risen, came upon him, and twitted him with looking distressed.

In a fit of confidence, he showed the girl the wound. And she, seeing her opportunity, petted him, and as soon as she in decency could turn him from his distress, told him of her discovery of the

Modeyne skeleton—opened the ugly cupboard and let it tumble out.

And into the ears of the brooding man the hot red lips dropped a poisonous suggestion of the girl's seeking marriage with Horace.

The man was in the mood to see ghosts in every shadow. He was too much taken up with his own affairs to smell an ugly plot amongst his own kin.

He went to the library, his fast unbroken, and with a sour mouth, and rang the bell. He told the footman who answered his summons to send a maid to Miss Modeyne's room and tell her he would like to see her when she came down.

Betty came tripping at the summons; shut the door; and stood a-wonder before the shamed seated man.

She stepped forward anxiously:

"Mr. Malahide," she said—"I hope you are not ill."

He shook his head.

He saw that the white hand she put on the desk trembled. A hoarse note came into her voice:

"I hope nothing has happened to your son—Horace——"

He shook his head.

"No, Miss Betty—but I have had information, through a friend, an old friend of my family, this morning that I believe is a lie. I hope to God—it is—a—lie."

Betty suddenly understood that she was the subject of the interview, and silence fell upon her. She drew herself up quietly and awaited the blow.

"Miss Betty, this good lady says that your father was a quite impossible person. She says that he was a notorious drunkard. Was he?"

Betty bowed her head.

"Yes," she said simply.

The hope went out of the man's eyes; he tried again, trusting to a denial:

"She says that he was the subject of a coroner's inquest, and that his disreputable life was the talk of the town a while ago. Was that so?"

Betty said nothing.

"She says that he was a Papist—that you came into my house and breathed no word of it. Is that so?"

Still no answer.

"She says that your companionship may sully the innocence of my girls; which is a damned lie—excuse my saying so. . . . But she says that people are making comments about my girls being seen with you. . . . I wish to God that were a lie too."

The brooding man put his face in his hands; and there was a long silence.

He roused after a little while and went on again:

"She says that you, if you stay here, may win the regard of my boy Horace—she says that it would be worse than Miss Sally Ornce."

For a moment Betty thought wearily that he referred to the

allurements of some rival lady. It suddenly came to her that the poor fellow meant *mésalliance*.

The clumsy man gazed miserably out of the window :

" I don't know what in God's wonder to do," he said.

The girl bowed :

" I understand," she said. " I will go."

She went and shook hands with him ; and quietly left the room. . . .

The two ladies, straining their ears at the door that stood slightly ajar into the next room, were edified.

They opened the door a little way and peeped in.

They would have been extremely annoyed had they known that Betty had caught a glimpse of them—had taken in the situation at a flash.

They were surprised to hear their father sigh. When he put his head down on the table and sobbed, they stole away.

Indeed, tittering over the details afterwards with friends, they *declared*, if we may take the word of such as listen at doors, that they were highly amused—that it was near as good as a play. . . .

Betty, tipping the cabman for taking her trunk up to her attic, knocked at Miss Flora Jennyns' door, entered, and, running to the little old lady's chair, sank on the footstool at her feet and flung her arms about her knees.

" I have come home," she said, happy to be with the old gentlewoman again.

Miss Flora put out her hand and stroked the girl's brown hair ; and she smiled through tears.

" I have been very lonely," she said.

A couple of days after Betty had gone, Mr. Pompey Malahide sat down at his desk, a bland smile upon him, and wrote to his son :

" Dear Horace,

The Tory Chest has, you will perhaps have guessed, received another twenty thousand pounds from me. But one must, as a patriot, make sacrifices for the good of the country. You will, I feel sure, be proud to know that the Malahides—our branch of them—are about to take rank as Baronets.

I regret to state, however, that there has been, at the Carlton, a distinct aloofness of the members of the Upper House towards me personally, since we came in with so large a majority, in so much that I feel, on entering some of these men's houses, as if I were breathing air that had passed over ice.

On careful consideration over my political ideals, I have lately come to the conclusion (and I have aristocratic precedents for changing my political opinions), that, on receiving my baronetcy, I shall take the first dramatic and telling opportunity to embarrass the Government and go over to the other side of the House.

Your affectionate father,

Pompey Malahide."

To which Horace replied by return :

"Dear old Father,

I wish you would not split your verbs so recklessly. To resist the condescension of the new aristocracy in the way you suggest would be, for you, utterly disastrous, both as a matter of good taste and as a dramatic effect—to say nothing of a bid for social distinction.

The test of good manners in the highly placed is the capacity for the exercise of extreme insolence without offence to the estimation of the class. What would be a vulgarity in you or me is a splendid airiness in the Prime Minister. Your fine gentleman may seduce a lady's maid, but must not be seen to cheat at cards. The tears of a seduced woman set the tables of the new nobility a-titter ; but to win a guinea by oversharp practice with trumps is to discover the moth amongst the ermine on the cloak of honour. Your courtier's manners are but gaudy beads strung on a thread of menial subtleties. You have not the practice, my dear father ; and would only blunder upon the indecencies.

The new aristocracy demands our patience—it takes three hundred years of usage before a family becomes quite used to its own nobility ; by that time it is usually bankrupt.

It is only possible for a man of birth and unassailable breeding to become a radical without appearing ridiculous.

Your affectionate son,

Horace."

CHAPTER XXXIV

Which, to some extent, discloses the Incident of the Sentimental Tea-cups

Anthony, forestalling the youngster's fretting for the girl's companionship, decided to send him up to Oxford at once ; but with all haste it was some months before he could go, and the lad, though he stuck manfully to his heavy work with the tutor, became languid and listless and vague. He fretted silently, and was filled with an ugly distrust of those about him. It had brought to him a sudden revelation of the need to stand alone—a revelation that is a part of the heritage of life to all at emergence from youth, but comes to some roughly enough.

He grimly forbore from asking questions, and fell away from his frank boyish friendship with his own people—the cheery, intimate, and open goodfellowship with his father and his mother gave way to a strange aloofness, and there developed in its place a self-reliance and a haughty desire to try the wings of his own judgment that bred much foolishness, as well as strength. His mother sadly put down the lad's cubbishness to the coming of manhood, and accepted much of the brusqueness as being a part of the inevitable period of cubhood when the whelp is for trying its strength and for leaving the litter.

The lad's arrival at Oxford started the man's shadow in him to life. He moved towards the shadow eagerly, and grasped at the reality which cast it. Flung suddenly into a sea of youth of his own age, he was at grips with his own strength at once—tried it, as by instinct, against the wills of the youths about him, all of whom, also come abroad out of their homes, were essaying their strength and affections and cunning upon each other, straining the cords wilfully to the breaking pitch both of the affections and of the hostilities.

It was the best thing that could have happened to the young blood ; the strain of the life kept him from the fret of the injustice that had been put upon him, and drew his mind for awhile from brooding on the blackness of the empty place where his natural mate had until now moved in dainty harmony with his existence.

He was in a new world.

He suddenly found, to his surprise, that there was that which gave him position amongst the undergraduates which had been completely ignored amongst the intellectual Bohemians. These others had taken him on his merits—he was now taken on the merit of his family. He found that the important thing was not as to what he was, but as to what his father was. He was given his place and his measure of pleasantnesses largely in the degree of his social position. He awoke to the fact that he had a social position—a rung on a long ladder, reaching up to dignity and the smiles of the dignified others.

The atmosphere here was wholly different. It was less literary, more academic ; less intellectual, more scholastic ; less original, more conventional ; less artistic, more grammatic—life, literature, art, every human activity was judged, not by the standard of the emotions, but by the restrictions of the common law, by precedents. The very pleasures were built upon tradition ; he could not amuse himself as he willed without being looked upon askance. And all this atmosphere, odd to say, was not created by the professors, but by the youths of his own age, who were coming up from the great public schools.

The young fellow began at once to win the friendship of such of the youngsters as had his own frank habits and ways ; and it was at this phase that was born his lifelong friendship with young Horace Malahide.

Everything in the relation of his fellows to him was done through an atmosphere. His first term threw him into nodding acquaintance with two or three young peers of his own year, and with youngsters who were the sons of county magnates—several of them indeed county magnates themselves. These young fellows he found to be friendly and genial to a certain point, when suddenly they stepped into another atmosphere from which he was subtly excluded. It was done by the most delicate of tricks, and was chiefly made apparent by their manner towards another in their own atmosphere as in comparison with their manner towards him. He noticed the youngsters who had been school-friends at the great public schools, now drifted apart, shifted their affection, stepped quietly away from their old association and habits, and were swallowed each into a well-defined set. . . .

When, however, Noll returned to Oxford for his second term he found himself in a new atmosphere. One of the young peers walked into his rooms as an intimate friend—accosted him with the heartiness that showed him he had passed into the set—he was the same youth—the other was the same youth—something had chanced, and changed the attitude.

Noll bent his big brows upon it, resenting it as an impertinence. But the others were equally urbane, friendly—yet not a word passed—there was nothing to make the excuse for a resentment.

He only knew some while afterwards that Lord Wyntwarde had asked the youth, meeting him in the hunting-field, if a young cousin of his, one Noll Baddlesmere, were not up at Magdalen with

him. The youth had passed the word quite subtly. Gentlemen should never do vulgar things vulgarly.

Noll thenceforth moved in *the* set, and its allied sets. He breathed *the* atmosphere. But being an airy person, of kindly and genial nature, he was not by way of examining into motives, nor of very strictly carrying out the subtle hints of the others in the Atmosphere; thus it came about that he dove-tailed several cliques that would otherwise have practised a more rigid exclusiveness towards each other.

And he carried with him, into the most exclusive groups of young nobles, amongst whom he was soon well-liked, his genial friend Horace Malahide. . . .

Noll's career at Oxford was a short one.

He nearly got through his first year.

A certain superficial cleverness laid the gin for the lad's fall.

His taste in literary expression had been cultivated to a brilliancy beyond his years by association with the witty Bohemians, and by the reading of good work; it had, above all, been developed by the artistic guidance of Eustace Lovegood. The lad therefore now found it difficult to wade through the cheap academic facetiousness and thin style of the literary ventures that exploited in dullard local reviews the anæmic wit which passed for fiery originality amongst the undergraduates, and mistook itself for a revolutionary upheaval in their puerile and stupid magazines.

It was natural that he should write, with an almost uncanny facility, a sketch, daring, skilful, and precocious enough to stand out amidst this dead level of the commonplace. He at once made a mark which exaggerated his powers, judged only by comparison with much that was colourless and bloodless and vapid and weak.

As a sure result, having caught the eye of the others, and hearing himself quoted, he wrote again; and by the greatest misfortune and not in the least realizing that he was stirring the most offensive of mud in the otherwise healthy stream of the life of the schools, he wrote a satiric sketch on the Greek friendship of two notorious youths, that sent spluttering laughter through the halls and common-rooms, and made the position of the two young nobles at the university wholly untenable. The laughter that greeted *The Eton Marriage* was not run down when Horace Malahide followed with a satiric newspaper report of the divorce of the two youths, in which dons were solemnly trotted out as chaperons and society beauties and lawyers and officers of the court; whilst a ridiculous series of questions and answers, in examination and cross examination, aired the foibles and cranks and eccentricities and confirmed waggeries of the more pronounced local celebrities.

Written as a mere whimsical squib on the seemingly ill-assorted friendship of a burly athletic youth for a dandified effeminate lordling of almost womanly beauty and æsthetic pretensions, the squib burst and discovered an awful and ugly state of affairs. To none did it bring more startling illumination than to the makers of the squib.

Both Noll and Horace were staggered at the scandals their somewhat tasteless fooling disclosed. There was much hushing up to be done. The two young nobles would soon be assisting to govern the country; and they must be saved—thus the tradition worked. They found life at the university wholly impossible, and retired to the House of Lords—to their peers, so runs the quaint phrase.

Noll and Horace hammered out the business, and came to the conclusion that a certain lack of good-taste on their own part had cost their beloved university a very ugly blow; they withdrew their names at the hint of the solemn faces of their masters and superiors who ruled over them, and gave their farewell reception.

They purged their contempt in tea.

Noll, in a fit of retrenchment, said it must be tea; having discovered that he had run through his whole three years' allowances. Horace, always shy of displaying his wealth, on the theory that it was against good taste in the newly enriched, supported the decision for economy and tea—and ordered the most exquisite Limoges service for the solemnities.

In far London, Bartholomew Doome, scenting aroma of naughtiness in the air, hastened down to Horace and Oxford for the day, fearing to be out of the scandal, and added his Byronic gloom and atmosphere of tragic wickedness to the smoke-filled rooms. He made a profound impression and many friends; indeed, it may be admitted without exaggerating his success that he was betrayed into no slightest hint of a decent emotion.

The tea being drunk, and the kindly farewells taken, the roomful of youths solemnly stood up, and Noll and Horace as solemnly broke their cups that none should again drink from them or sully the memory of the glorious days they had all spent together. The pieces were flung into the street.

The others, each taking a cup and saucer with them, in memory of their friendship, shook hands and filed slowly out.

As youth broke sentimental tea-cups, the Oxford tradesman who owned the debt for them, sitting in his little counting-house, was reading a letter from a Hebrew friend in the offices of The Tradesmen's Defence League in London.

This letter, after various facetious references to the tradesman's family, proceeds to display the very shrewdest knowledge of the details that made up Noll's family history—his connections, his prospects—not wholly unmixed with some sly wit and comical allusions. The writer thinks that Noll may be a coming man, he has done so badly at Oxford; considers that he is not devoid of generous and honourable instincts; is of opinion that any debt he may contract will eventually be paid; and ends with the personal note as thus:

"I like a man as can slop the gilders about a bit, myself. And as for academic honours, why, you and me was neither of us strong in book-learning, but we've kept our noses above the water, and

the seats of our trousers off the hospitable benches, and our integrity outside the doors of, the bankruptcy receiving-houses; and we could teach the Government a thing or two in raising the wind and the mysteries of profitable taxation, Samuel. . . . Let the young ass eat his thistles—only see to it that you have a mortgage on the crop.

I hold out my homely fist.

REUBEN MCCUBBIE.

P.S.—This here Oliver Baddlesmere ain't so far off the peerage as some. I have heard it whispered that he is nearer to it than what even you or me is.

They do say, too, that the cub has found a girl. Early marriage, Samuel, gives hostages against the most gentlemanly blackguardism.

But I garrule.

Again I hold out the aforesaid fist.

Be good.

This letter seems to be all about money. I sometimes think I'm a damned Jew.

Nevertheless, be good.

Bless my soul, how these boys do get through the unearned increment!"

CHAPTER XXXV

Wherein we are bewildered by the Cooings of Chivalry

Betty, flung back again upon her own resources, realized that, for a woman, there were two careers elaborately ordered by the deliberate plan of the world—marriage or vice. For the rest, to woman had been flung the slave-callings, the menial ends of professions, the ill-paid jobs of the commerce of life. This shabby deed of gift was leprously covered by an hypocrisy of Chivalry—which in practice largely worked out as the courting, when it did not interfere with other pleasures, of the young and comely women; the seizing and exploiting of the fortunes of the middle-aged; and the neglect of the old and the unprepossessing.

For a while Betty was at her wits' end to know how to earn the wage of decency, when she again decided to apply to Netherby and ask him to get her some literary hack-work; and Netherby, entrusting her with a review or two of books, was delighted with the result, as was also his editor. Betty felt thankful to be doing work that did not force upon her the wading in personal humiliations; and this her new means of breadwinning, small though it was, helped in its very exercise to give her facility in the craftsmanship of her art—her hand thereby increased its cunning, and literary expression became a confirmed habit. She soon passed from the stage of seeking a style—the careful and laborious picking out of the notes from the music of the instrument and the placing them in telling harmonies, to the mastery of the whole range and gamut of the instrument, when the music came resonant and vivid in answer to the mood of her desire.

And she practised also the inevitable type-writer, taking bouts of work upon occasion, to win a little bread or to help Julia to the winning. Click-click-click went the deft fingers, spelling out into print the ill-shaped grammar of the city.

She saw much of Julia in these days; and to Julia she brought incalculable good—her cheerfulness and the gaiety and tenderness of her sweet young womanhood gave to the narrow-shouldered half-starved city girl a wholesome companionship that filled out her thin life and enlarged her cockney vision. Julia inhaled the atmosphere of good-breeding and of uncomplaining cheerful

courage which was Betty's very breath; and she grew to infinite riches by sharing the golden gifts that Betty had to give her.

Slave-castes mistake womanishness for womanliness. A true woman is neither an idiot nor a man.

The girl Julia had lived her girlhood receptively feminine—courageous in her defensive virtues. She was now roused to the positive virtues of womanhood.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Which touches upon the Pains of Enjoying the Glow of Self-Abasement whilst Maintaining a Position of Dignity

As Noll and Horace stood on the platform of the railway-station at Oxford, waiting for the London express to take them to town, Horace Malahide began to feel some discomfort about the brooding mood of the other—for the first time he was distressed with the question whether they ought not to have remained at Oxford. He knew that Noll had but narrow means. Guessing that Noll was in some embarrassment as to how to explain his sudden return to his people, he, to divert him from worrying, called his wandering attention to a newspaper criticism upon a book which had just come out and was creating considerable stir in the literary world.

Horace, holding up the newspaper criticism, put his finger upon the name of Caroline Baddlesmere. Noll roused and read the notice. The writer, Anthony Bickersteth, was proclaimed as the founder of a new school—a new star had risen above the dead level of the commonplace literature of the day—and all of the review that was not violent praise of this Anthony Bickersteth was the cover for a bitter and sneering screed against the work of Caroline Baddlesmere, who, so it bluntly averred, had gone well-nigh to destroying English as an artistic language. The writer's judgment would have been of more weight, perhaps, had his English been of more value ; but even his ill-balanced phrasing, his academic eyes, his dullard's palate, and his faulty ear, could not altogether damn the object of his adoration ; and Noll, struck by the beauty of phrasing in some of the quoted passages, bought a copy of the book at the station stall as the train came clanking in. He ran through its pages on his journey to town. . . .

As they rattled through the outskirts of London, Horace, who had been watching the other's face, asked :

" Is it any good, Noll ?"

Noll shut up the book, and stretched himself :

" Very good," said he—" but I think the fellow would have shown better taste not to hit at my mother in the Preface."

There was a long pause.

Horace broke it :

"Noll, old boy," said he—"shall I drive you home?"

"I'm not going home, thanks," said Noll—and he added, seeing surprise in the eyes of the other: "I've got to face old Lord Wyntwarde first—he's a sort of relation of mine—and has been paying for my being at Oxford. . . . My own people are very badly off. . . . I don't think I ought to let the unpleasantness of the interview fall upon my people. And I'm funking it. . . ." And he added grimly, after a while: "I understand why men sometimes get drunk."

Horace laughed:

"Oh," said he—"it'll blow over all right. . . . Look here, Noll; you'd better come to my people to-day, stay over the night, and go on to-morrow to the eating of dirt. . . ."

So it came that Noll spent his first evening in the Malahide household. And the girls both vowed the next day to their separate bosom friends that they "had met their fate." It leaked out during the confidences of each that Horace had discovered to them that the youth was kinsman to a certain Lord Wyntwarde. . . .

The hot-headed old lord stood a-straddle before his fireplace, and smiled grimly.

How the blood of this house repeated itself!

Here was this young fellow pacing up and down the room as though he were laying down the terms of a surrender.

By the dogs, a handsome young fellow! Like his mother—with a trick or two of the father in him.

He himself had thus prowled this room in like disgrace with the lord of the house years ago. What a while ago! . . . This lad's father also—now this one! By the book, wonderful!

The fact was that the old lord's wilful admiration followed this proud lad with a sense of affection that was strange to him—the youth appealed to him more than did the more elaborate father. He had more of the beauty of the old house about him.

"Noll, my lad," said he, "I haven't been listening over-well to what you have been saying—I've been thinking hard that you ought to have been my son."

Noll stopped in his walk, stopped in his talk—hesitated.

He uttered an embarrassed laugh:

"I have been apologizing, sir," he said.

"Have you?" growled Wyntwarde. "That is a relief to me—I thought you were ordering *me* to apologize."

Noll shrugged his shoulders, and took to his pacing of the room again, silenced.

The old lord watched him grimly, saying nothing.

Noll suddenly halted, swung round, and faced him:

"I am sorry, sir," said he—"I ought to have rid you of my company before this. But I felt bound to make you what poor reparation I could for all your goodness to me. I did not write, because—a personal apology is always far more punishment to me than the written word. This has been a punishing task to me

—I have dreaded it—loathed it. And yet, I fear, it has seemed but a lame and sorry reparation to you. . . . I will not fret you any longer. I am done."

Wyntwarde laughed :

" Oho, Noll—so you are run dry at last ! . . . Now I can get a word in edgeways ; and I, too, may cackle, though it lack your literary finish. . . . You see, as we are in the confessional, I may say I have been a bit of a dog in my day. And, by Beelzebub ! the gout hasn't altogether driven the last spark out of me yet. . . . The tongues still wag about me, I have no smallest doubt. . . . It isn't for me to preach you a sermon on your tomfollies, for they are infernally like my own. By God, you are no curate, there's that much against you in heaven. Still, I will tell you bluntly, I have only had one fear for you—and that is the dandified schoolmaster that is in the heart of your father. The Ffolliotts never had any of the damned studious habits—we have always been sportsmen and gentlemen. And, by my soul, I believe you are bitten by the self-same dog. . . . It's this literary business that makes me anxious about you : but a lampoon and a sharp tongue we all of us had the knack of using—*that* don't go with long hair and inky fingers and spectacles nor a milkman's seat on a horse. By God, you may lampoon the Lord Chancellor, for all *I* care—I never go to the House of Lords except to keep the damned idiot in his place. Lords Chancellor nowadays seem to think the Upper House is a confounded dames' school. Damn all Lords Chancellor, say I——"

" Yes, sir—damn all Lords Chancellor !" said Noll drily.

Wyntwarde laughed :

" Yes," said he—" we wander. . . . Now, look you here, Noll —this house is free to you as long as you keep your fingers from inkstains and your lips from preaching—the stables are not empty of horses. And, what's more, I still hold to my bond. The 'Varsity is over—down goes three hundred a year. It would be damned bad morals to give you that again. But you shall have a couple of hundred a year as long as rumour speaks well of you ; but the day you throw up the society of gentlemen and mix with the inky-fingered gentry, I will not only cancel you from my will, but, by the dogs, I stop even the allowance——"

" I do not accept benefits under threat, sir," said Noll.

Wyntwarde stopped, scowled—burst into a laugh, and passed the matter by :

" I would make it more," he said ; " but I suspect the ink-pot——"

" If I have a mind to spill ink I will spill it," said the youth hotly.

The old lord chuckled :

" You are your father's son, my boy, on occasion," said he. " Well, there's nothing to attract you here just now ; but you had better come down for the hunting next winter, eh ?"

Noll made a step towards him—hesitated—his mouth hardened :

"I cannot stay in a house, sir, which my mother has struck off her visiting list," he said sullenly.

The old lord laughed loudly and long:

"By God," said he—"you are a man!"

He went to the youth and gripped him by the shoulders:

"No, Noll—it can't be. Your mother would never stand the new aristocracy—it's so damned like the old profligacy—without the breeding. . . . Good-bye, my boy; and damn all inkstains, say I!" . . .

As Noll reached London he decided to go and see his mother, and make her acquainted with his doings and his intentions. He had an uneasy feeling that he had unjustly neglected her of late.

He was glad to find, when he arrived, that his father was away from home.

As his mother stood there in her attic, listening to him, Noll was filled with a glow of pride in her gentle womanly dignity and her resourceful and uncomplaining good breeding.

The place had an air that made the word "attic" classical. . . .

Noll, somewhat embarrassed as to how to broach the subject, had begun by denouncing the preface to the new book which held a sneer at his mother; and she had laughed it quietly by. Then Noll had told her of the reviews; and ended by giving her something of a lesson in the art of letters! He himself thought very well of this new book—and gave his mother more than one good hint from Anthony Bickersteth.

Caroline turned to the little mirror over the mantel, as the youth finished speaking, to hide a little dry smile that played about her mouth. She touched her hair with handsome white hands. It was a trick she had.

Noll saw the movement; caught the reflected smile in the mirror; and faltered.

It came to him that he had been just a trifle patronizing to his mother about this new book by Anthony Bickersteth—a little condescending about her powers. He was chilled with a sudden uneasiness.

"Well, Noll?" she asked.

Noll went to the attic window and looked out:

"Mother," said he—"I feel ashamed of these doles from Wyntwarde—I must win a career with the pen, and be rid of them."

"You are taking to the hardest trade in the world, Noll—and all the harder because it looks the easiest. Still, I am wholly with you in the sentiment. I should be sorry indeed to see you dependent on Wyntwarde. And I am glad to have you at home—I was looking at your child toys last night, and—I—felt—almost—as if—you were dead!"

Noll was silent for awhile:

"I find it rather hard to say what I came to say, mother, after that," said he.

"Ah, Noll," she said—"it is not your fault or mine that child-

hood must pass, with all its delight—we might as well try to hold the hand of death. . . . Say what you came to say——"

"Well, mother—I have found a couple of rooms in New Inn, that will just hold me ; and, without Wyntwarde's help, I ought to be able to keep myself and get into the way of winning my own bread in a very few months."

Caroline Baddlesmere sighed :

"Yes, Noll—it is perhaps better that you should make your own life—and in your own way. It is one of the agonies of motherhood that the brood must leave the nest."

"No, mother—it is not that. . . . I have to pass a room on the stairs that—in the passing—makes my heart ache—takes the man out of me."

His lip trembled.

"Yes, Noll ; I understand. I have seen you fret at many things here—as I myself have sometimes fretted at them. . . . I am able, too, to help you a little now—I have had a little windfall——"

Noll left the window and went to his mother. He put his hands on her shoulders :

"No, mother. I will have none of it. You ought not to be living in an attic—and I am not going to help to keep you there. It is one of the prospects that will make me work—that I should see you in your proper position. Not that, God knows, this attic has ever given me a moment's shame ; for you have made it a palace to me."

Caroline kissed his handsome face:

"Noll," said she—"you are something of a man."

CHAPTER XXXVII

Which is Uneasy with the Restlessness of Youth

Sir Pompey Malahide came into his baronetcy on a fine summer's day ; and Noll spent the resulting week of high festivities with Horace and the family, and there strengthened his friendship with Bartholomew Doome, whose unsnobbish affection and care of the rough merchant won Noll's regard even more than his grim humour.

Horace, his father baroneted and the feasting done, decided to go to Paris for a change—" to get the odour of cooked bullocks from his nostrils." Noll saw him off at the railway-station ; saw his man Jonkin, of the ducal manner, tuck him up in his railway-carriage ; watched the train slide out of the station—and sighed to lose the light-hearted companionship of the sunny youth.

The departing of a comrade sends a cloud across the bluest sky.

Noll, with the confidence of youth, decided to be a literary celebrity.

He felt that it would be a brilliant and fascinating position to hold ; and it required no capital. It was not to be bought. There was an air about it.

But the having his own study and separate establishment did not raise the masterpiece out of the deeps—nor did the world thrill at his originality so readily as he had hoped. He did much chewing of the quill.

Being young, he wrote for art's sake ; and it was the beginning of several affectations in which he half believed.

His solitary hours of work, and of brooding upon work, were fretted with other and more overwhelming dreams. The rustle of women's petticoats began to trouble him as he wrote. In the faces that passed him in the street he saw beckoning eyes under many a pretty bonnet. And the writing, dragging already for want of life and substance, now further dragged, interrupted by the frills and figures of women.

All nature's urging of the adolescent to part from the parent brood was calling upon him to pair ; and the mystic fascination of the fragrance of women was enhanced by the restlessness of

dawning manhood that vexes the lustiness of youth with the blatant trumpet-call to action, the fret to be up and about and doing.

The dainty place that Betty had held by his side was empty. And the gentle companionship of the girl that had filled the lad's life gave way to a vague hunger for affection.

To him in his grey loneliness came, as fairy to brooding Cinderella, lighting the sordid gloom of his toil, fitful flashes of the girl's face in his day-dreams. Betty still held vague possession of his affections. But youth is not content to clutch at thin air.

Noll cudgelled his wits at the desk of his lonely room, in vain.

The masterpiece would not come.

Then the youth decided that he was making a mistake—he was keeping himself too much to himself. He would go deep into the literary world. He was convinced that a literary man can do nothing unless he be in the Literary Swim.

A letter from Horace was his confirmation. Horace was fascinated by the student-life of Paris—its free-handed comradeship, its gaiety, its good-fellowship in all things, its frank acceptance of nature, its rebellion against the rigid conventions, its freedom from cant, its glory in the joy of life. He had decided to give up his life of wealth at home for a few years, to be a poor student in Paris for awhile, to put aside the boredoms of the pampered rich, and, like the strenuous man, to live life largely.

He thought, on the whole, he would keep his valet on—but Jonkin was to dress like himself, as a student, corduroy trousers, black coat, slouch hat and all. There was to be no tomfoolery in it—he was going to be the poor student right through. And the girls of the Latin quarter, heavens! he kissed his hand to them. . . .

Within a month, Noll was elected to a literary club—one of those places where men turn in to wash their hands on the way to the *Athenæum*.

At the first entry into this club, the youth felt that he was come amongst the very wits. But the minor critic Fosse fussed about him, and took the earliest confidential opportunity to whisper to him with wink and nod that it was owing to *his* interest in him that Noll had been elected over the heads of men who had been waiting for years at the portals in vain. The thrill trickled out of the glamour of his election a little as each of several others confided to Noll that it was owing to *his* exertions and *his* following that his election had been so speedily secured—and that everyone else in the gathering was but mediocre and painstaking. His conceit in his honours slowly leaked away.

Then Mr. Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre, though kind, at once roused uneasiness and soul-searchings in the youth. He pointed out that the man of genius was the type of his time, the outward and visible as much as the inward and spiritual; that in our age the face of genius wore a moustache—Bismarck and Rhodes and Whistler all wore the moustache.

Quogge Myre himself wore a moustache. . . .

As the glamour of initiation wore off, the youth was oppressed with the barrenness of the land—the petty jealousies, the tittle-tattle, the spites, the little treacheries.

He came to have an unpleasant and mean desire to sit the others out always—he knew that the moment the door closed upon him they tore his weaknesses to pieces, and garbled his motives.

And still the masterpiece did not come. . . .

Netherby Gomme, lunching with him at the club, ended by walking back with him to his rooms; and, out of the earshot of the precious company, he warned the youth not to fling his fresh ideas to these people if he would weave them into his own art.

"These are the jackals of the arts, Noll," said he grimly—"they filch the ideas of other men—they follow hot-foot on the latest success, turning out indifferent copies of the master-wits—they will suck your brains, vampire-like. These are they who, when a genius appears, cannot lift their eyes to his magnificence, to the beauty of his imagination, can but seek out the sources of his inspiration and laboriously accuse him of the footsteps in which he had trod. Be rid of the crew. Or, keep your quaint conceits for your workshop. Give them but the chips. . . . You gave those fellows this very day the scheme for a large work of art—they have not the brains to see the potentialities that lie latent in an idea—so some fellow of them will make a catchy magazine essay of it—catch the newness of it and exploit it. They are as vulgar thieves as though they stole your pence. . . . They are no help to you—I have done my best work even in my small way, as many a really big man has done his, in the back room of a dingy house, looking out upon a brick wall. What is in you is in you—you can benefit nothing from these others. . . . If you have companions, have splendid companions—the big rich-souled man. Friendship is the top of ambition. These others will steal your very tears."

So the humorist with his arm in Noll's, affectionately; and left Noll brooding at the threshold of his simple home. . . .

Netherby spoke prophecy.

A month or two later, an article in a leading review, signed by Mr. Fosse, won some notice by its youthful daring, indiscretion, and invention—Noll sighed to see his own wits could be so shabbily clothed.

Noll took up the magazine by veriest chance at the club.

He read the sorry thing, and flung it upon the table; and, as he flung it down, Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre entered the room.

"Ah, Aubrey," cried he to the languid poet, with loud voice that was ever pitched to carry his carefully wrought spontaneities to the listening world: "I am sorry to be late, but, for pleasant hours with Lady Persimmon, I could almost be content to appear ill-bred. She moves me—so few women move me." He sat down beside the poet, and slapped the poetic leg giddily: "For

a handsome woman one must neglect even a poet, eh? Haha! even the handsomest and the chastest of them all love their squeeze. Not that I—you know—eh?"

"Tsh!" muttered Aubrey, who had been vainly attempting to check the flow of Myre's conceit—"Baddlesmere, over there, is her cousin."

Myre turned a dirty putty colour.

Noll got up from his chair and walked out of the club. . . .

Bartholomew Doome rose languidly from a lounge:

"It was a happy thing for your pink and white complexion, Myre, that Noll Baddlesmere has been too absent-minded to overhear your yawing. I do not think I have ever seen you glitter more consummately caddish. Besides which, you lied. But that's a detail. To lie to save a woman's honour has an air—to lie against her is to be banal. It has been done before—and so often."

He strolled towards the door.

Myre said:

"It is a happy thing for some people that the duel is dead."

Bartholomew Doome laughed—went out laughing—laughed the length of Piccadilly. . . .

An urgent demand from the Secretary, asking for his subscription, Noll sent on to Mr. Fosse, with a waggish note:

"Dear Fosse,

I know from your own lips that I owe my election to the club to your kind offices; and I should be sorry indeed to think that my failure to pay my subscription may cast a slur upon you as my sponsor. I find that the sum that you borrowed from me when you won your success in *The Discriminator* fully covers my subscription, and yields you a handsome profit, and I would beg that you take advantage of the admirable opportunity of paying your debt to me by paying my debt to the club; you will increase my indebtedness to you by withdrawing my name from the books.

Yours, not wholly without admiration,

Noll Baddlesmere."

Mr. Fosse, odd to say, paid the subscription.

* * * * * *

When Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre called at Lady Persimmon's the next day he was told that her ladyship was not at home.

"But," said my pushful gentleman—"I have just seen visitors go in."

The footman put himself across the doorway, barring entrance:

"You are Mr. Myre, sir?"

"Yes."

"Her ladyship has given instructions that she is never at home to persons of the name of Myre. Go away." He slammed the door in the great man's face.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

Which has to do with the Breaking of a Pretty Lady's Picture

Horace at this time by letter again urges Noll to get him forthwith and for awhile to Paris and live amongst the clouds—puts it in terms of poetry and of romance and of pounds shillings and pence—essaying all the temptations. His letter ends on the Horatian note: "And, my dear old Noll, do, for the love of art, go and see my people. My old father has urgings to speak on the Liberty of the Press—England's great Heritage of Freedom—the Source of her Magnificence, of her Benignant Purity—which through Journalism has built up the Conscience of the People—Tol-lol-der-rol-lol-der-rol-lay—and all the rest of it. You know the thumping music of the National Organ when all the stops are out. Now, do give Doome some aid in educating the dear old sire in letters. Look what revolution he hath wrought in English furnishments! The father's name; is it not become the household word for the artistic home? And why? Because *he discovered the Man* who could tell him what was good furnishment. He himself at inmost heart prefers the cuckoo-clock. . . . And the girls too, thou canst widen their view, enlarge the outlook of their narrow Putney eyes; your good-fellowship must of a certainty mitigate their cockney ambitions. They write to me of 'cutting' people—'giving the cold shoulder' to old friends—they are bitten with all the smart vulgarities, for all the world like *déclassé* duchesses and such as are not of assured position. Get thee to my father's house, Noll—and bear with the overplus of marble, the gaudy boastfulness of the too ornate enrichments. There's a big heart at the back of it all, and it loves thee.

Horace.

P.S.—I never suspected Jonkin of being a prude. He makes me feel thrillingly immoral—like a school-girl reading her first classic."

When Noll arrived at the Malahides in the afternoon, Sir Pompey was away from home; but the ladies of the house greeted him gladly.

He had not been long with the two young women before he was overwhelmed with the embarrassment of their frank admiration.

The elder girl caused him no little uneasiness by her attitude towards him; which the buxom Miss Mary further increased by

very soon and most openly expressing her design to find solace in the society of a youth from the city who was to escort her to some shopping, adding boldly that the figure of two had in it more likely elements of good company than the awkward wriggle called three ; and, with a suggestive laugh, she swaggered out of the room.

Noll was never wholly at home amongst the crudities ; but he shook off embarrassment, and made an effort to entertain the comely Judith.

But ordinary converse died a natural death—Judith Malahide was in no mood for words. She held the handsome young fellow with her handsome eyes ; she was unwontedly quiet, and, for marvellous and becoming change, her bearing was restrained with the compelling dignity of passion.

She came and stood by him, and Noll realized, with a catch of the breath, that he was being drawn into the whirl of a reckless young woman's inordinate desire.

"Why have you been so long away, Noll ?" she asked.

Noll in a careless moment answered lightly :

"How was I to know that you thought it long, Miss Judith ?"

The girl's mood took flame :

"There are things a man knows without the telling," she said. "I would not give a sigh for a man who——"

She turned and gazed out of the window ; and added with lowered voice :

"I had better not say what I was going to say ; but—your lips provoke me—to—say things."

Noll watched her for awhile—the exquisite skin, the undisciplined full red mouth, the handsome head. He found a strange pleasure in the nearness of her splendid beauty.

She turned to him suddenly ; caught the lingering admiration in his eyes :

"I should like to know exactly what you were thinking," she said, commandingly ; "do you think you dare tell me ?"

"I think I *dare*," he said lightly ; and added seriously : "But I would rather not."

"I want to know," she said.

"I was wondering whether a beautiful woman's beauty is as much pleasure to herself as it is to——"

"To whom ?" She finished the broken enigma for him.

"To those who look upon it," he evaded.

"And who was the woman, Noll ?"

He smiled :

"Well, to be frank, I would rather not say—it would sound rather fulsome."

She laughed, and reddened :

"I think most people, men and women, think they are good-looking—I think handsome people have pleasure in their good looks. . . . *I* have. . . . But it does not bring me the glow that looking at you gives me." She put her hand upon her bosom.

"Miss Judith !"

"Any more wonders to unravel ?" she asked.

"No," he said—"I think we had better not wonder too deeply."

She laughed sadly:

"So we are to be wise, eh?" She came close to him: "But you have not told me how *you* are moved by a woman's face—so how can I tell you—what——"

"Miss Judith, I am afraid we are playing with fire."

She turned, frowning out of the window:

"You are right," she said. "These things are made of fire—they are beyond speech." She turned and came very close to him: "But," she added hoarsely, "your lips could tell my lips—without—all this prattle——"

She put her warm hand upon his sleeve:

"I want to know," she said.

"Tsh!" said he.

She turned swiftly to the window.

A servant entered the room; and the girl, standing still, steadied herself with sudden self-command.

"Come," she said at last—"you have not seen the new white boudoir."

Noll roused, seizing an excuse to leave:

"I must be going," he said.

But she would have no denial; and led him upstairs to an exquisitely decorated white room, the beauty of which at once revealed the artistic taste of Bartholomew Doome.

Noll saw, as the door closed upon him, that he was in the girl's boudoir.

She came to him, put her arms about his neck, and kissed him.

"You do not kiss me, Noll," she complained passionately.

Noll unlocked her arms:

"Hush!" said he, and walked to the window.

She came and nestled against his shoulder.

"Noll, I can't live this nun's life——"

He put her gently from him:

"This is madness," said he—"utter madness——"

He strode to the door—stopped half way:

"My God!" he said hoarsely.

She followed the gaze of his eyes to the white mantel:

"What is it, Noll?"

"There is the picture of the girl—to whom I—am—betrothed."

She roused, and stepping, cat-like, to the mantel, took down the little portrait of Betty and flung it upon the white marble hearth. The glass smashed, flying into a hundred tinkling pieces.

Noll watched her coldly:

"Where is Betty Modeyne?" he demanded roughly.

The girl faltered, uttered a moan, and leaning her handsome head on the white hand that clutched the mantel, gazed down upon the shattered thing.

"Where is Betty Modeyne?" he asked, putting his hand gently on her shoulder.

She sighed, and said miserably:

"I'm sorry, Noll—but, thank God, I cannot tell you. She is gone."

CHAPTER XXXIX

Wherein, the Barber letting the Cat out of the Bag, we give Chase

In the gathering darkness of his dingy little room over the southern gate of New Inn sat Noll Baddlesmere in his shirt-sleeves, cudgelling his wandering wits for epigrams and the dramatic situation ; yet though the dun walls did not distract his attention with the restlessness of over-abundant gaieties, nor the sedate quietude nor the narrow view from his grimy windows strain his nerves—indeed, he could scarce hear the turmoil of the traffic in the great Strand hard by—he was unable to settle down to hard work, nor could he rid himself of the fret of his thoughts.

For hours he had thus striven to banish his loneliness, but our deceptions fail at last even to deceive ourselves. His instincts were bent on finding Betty ; and the gloom of the dying day, though it thwarted his eyesight and raised disturbing ghosts of thought, held the whisper of the fact that he had come near to the flying glimpse of her. It was as though her skirts had rustled across his dreams in the ornate halls of the Malahides, flipped into a baffling doorway, and vanished into mocking silence—yet but a door between. He fretted that he could find no slightest trace of her.

He flung down his pen ; arose from his desk in the dusky gloom ; dressed for the street ; and strolled out of his rooms aimlessly into the grey of the evening that held the old quadrangle in a smoky stillness.

In the vexed traffic of the Strand he suddenly bethought him of Devlin ; and straightway turned his steps towards the barber's.

As he reached the corner of the street where Devlin plied the scissors, he saw Myre hail a hansom and drive off in it.

Noll, entering the barber's room, was greeted by the little cockney Irishman with frantic delight ; and Noll himself was glad to step back across the threshold into his old world.

He gave up his hat to the dandified little man and sat down in the barber's chair before the mirror, the little man fussing about him the while.

"Devlin," said he, lying back in the chair, "I saw Mr. Myre leaving this place——"

Devlin flung a large white pinafore round the youth and tied it at the back of his neck.

"That's so, sir," said Devlin. He tucked some white towels under his chin. "And faith, it's quite the great man he is now."

"Hoho!" said Noll—"affluent and well-to-do, eh? I suppose he has quite divorced himself from Art, then!"

"What's that?" screamed Devlin, stopping his lathering. "Mr. Myre divorced from Art!" He went to the door to see that it was carefully closed. "Whisht, sir; it's a fine hairy libel-action ye'll be wadin' in at the police courts, Mr. Noll, if ye don't hold a restraint on ye."

"But my good Devlin—he always swore that reward and affluence destroy the artist!"

Devlin laughed; and got back to his lathering:

"Ah, Mr. Noll, it's your old self, it is—findin' flaws in the Irish logic of him." He chose a razor. "By the book, I remember well the day Mr. Lovegood pulled the leg of the great man here. Ye'll remember it, maybe. No?" He held Noll's chin with damp fingers and began to shave: Well, says Mr. Myre, says he, it's death and to the devil with art when the artist works for money and reward, says he. That's so, says Mr. Lovegood, for I always thought meself, says Lovegood, down in the great resoundin' belly of him, says he: I always thought meself, says he, that Willie Shakespeare would have turned out less indifferent poetry, says he, if he hadn't been trying to fill the stalls in his old Globe Theatre all the time, says he, and makin' eight thousand a year, present reckoning, out of the damned blank poetry of him, says he. . . . Mr. Myre he licked his lips, wid a black sullen look on him, like a dog that's been robbed of his bone. And, by the powers, the most simple law officer of the Crown could have foretold that Mr. Myre was going to have a sudden engagement in the city thin and there from the wan smile that came over the head of him. But——"

He concentrated his whole attention for a while on the upper lip of Noll, and having shaved it, he added:

"But it's the black mental gloom that got a holt of the great man that day."

"Oh?" asked Noll.

"That's so," said the barber. "Oh, yes. . . . And ye didn't hear tell of it, sir? . . . Mother of God, it was the talk of the sivin continents. . . . Ah, begod, sure it's a damned penny-whistle this Fame, anny way. Ah, sir; it was a great fall that, mind ye. He took it like Julius Cæsar with the Opposition takin' hacks out of him under Pompey's pillar—just wid a wan dignified look on him. . . . Oh, yes; he's a great man. If stickin' to it, and the divil's own confidence in one's own greatness, and industry, and strong opinions and histrionic adultery can make genius, that man's a barrel of it——"

He was drying Noll's face, and removing the shaving-cloths from about his chin when the cling of the door-bell gave warning

that someone had entered the outer shop—footsteps came towards the room.

"Whisht!" said the barber, "here's Mr. Cartel Maungy."

"Who?"

"Whisht! I'll tell ye when he's gone, Mr. Noll. Sure, the paper's lyin' about there somewheres—and I'll have done with the gintleman in three minutes forty-five seconds."

Noll nodded, and betook himself to a seat, suspecting some mystery that the barber would divulge after his own quaint fashion, which brooked no hurrying—to end in some fantastic nothingness or a good story.

The door opened, and there entered, sedate and old-aired, a handsome dandified little old gentleman.

The barber, with gorgeous bow and diffident formality, relieved the silent man of his hat and cane, and leading him to a seat, soon had him swathed to the chin in cloths, and was shaving the soap-lathered ascetic face that gazed at the ceiling meditatively.

The shaving being done, and the swathings of many white cloths removed from about his chin and shoulders, the courtly figure arose from the chair, and being given his hat and cane by the even more elaborate barber, he withdrew from the room.

"Who's that?" asked Noll.

"Well, sir; he's a kind of Frenchified poet av the name of Cartel de Maungy. . . . The gintlemen call him The Man of Pallid Ideals," said the barber. "The gintlemen were saying only last night that he's been a bit of a literary genius in his time in the minor poet line; but Misther Myre he says the man's but an Inkstain on the Carpet of Time. Oh, but it's a trenchant tongue Misther Myre's got on him when he gets handlin' the comparisons against literary reputations——"

"Yes, yes, Devlin—never mind Mr. Myre. About this man of pallid ideals——"

The barber lowered his voice to the confidential:

"Ah, now that's a mighty queer story, Mr. Noll. It's the victim of the grand passion that man is; Vanus rest his soul. Victim? begod!—he's the hero of a romance that's kept a holt of him since his chin began the need of shavin'—and that's as long as your grandfather or mine can remimber the seasons. That man has just played on the music of his little love-affair until he's clean pulled the cat-gut out of the old fiddle—plucked at the shtrings of the old melody until he's torn the bowels out of the old harpsichord of Romance. . . . Sure, my father shaved him before me, and remembered the day it got about that the girl's father swore he'd have no damned Frenchified poetaster for son-in-law. And the little gintleman's been lovin' the girl ever since, until there's only the memory of them both left to each other. He might have married the little lady this forty years—the divil a soul to prevent it—but——"

He shrugged his shoulders, and gave up the tangle.

"Well?" asked Noll.

"Well, he goes and walks before her doorway every evenin', as

the twilight falls, and sometimes they take a stroll together. And —by the same token ! she lives in the same house where Miss Betty lodges——"

Noll rose to his feet.

"Where?"

The barber was startled.

Noll strode up to him :

"Where does Miss Betty live?" he asked, hoarsely.

The little barber gazed at him :

"It isn't ghosts ye are seeing, Mr. Noll?" he asked.

Noll put his hand on the other's shoulder :

"Quick, man—where is the house?"

"Ah, now—Mr. Noll—ye're pullin' the innocent leg of me," he said, laughing.

Noll pulled himself together. He strode to the door.

"Quick, Devlin—for God's sake ! Which way does—the—the man of pallid ideals usually go?" he asked roughly.

The barber followed him to the street, and standing in the lamp-lit dusk he pointed out the way :

"Up there, till ye reach that turn by the red pillar-box, then sharp to the right—then straight on till ye—— Begad, he's off like a policeman down the kitchen steps when the area belle's a-ringing——"

He stood gaping at the vanishing figure of the youth who strode up the street.

The little man's jaw dropped.

"Oh, murder !"

He scratched his poll aghast :

"Mother of God !" said he—"of coorse ! Victoria May Alice told me—there's been a misunderstandin'—or maybe even a partin'—or some heathen tom-noddy——"

He walked into his shop soberly.

"Mike Devlin," said he—and he rubbed his chin ruefully: "ye've put your great damn foot slap into the big drum of the farcical tragedy."

Noll strode out. In the glimmering grey of the hustling world he tramped ; but the hush was alive with whispers—and the blood was jumping in him.

He caught sight at last of the distant back of the Man of Pallid Ideals.

He turned, after some walking, into one of those silent streets that give off the noisy thoroughfare of the roaring city, and by the silence he knew that he was in a street where lodgings are. At once he slackened pace, for, a hundred strides before him, walked slowly the slender Man of Pallid Ideals, who at last halted, stood a little while looking up at a window across the street, sighed, and passed brooding into the twilight beyond.

Not so Noll.

He marked the halting-place, paced the distance, and swung round towards the house opposite.

In the topmost window was a light ; and Noll knew that by that light was Betty sitting—that the light was on her nut-brown hair—kissing her cheek——

He strode straight across the road, and rang the bell.

When the maid opened the door, Noll said :

" I wish to see Miss Betty Modeyne at once, please—lead the way to her rooms."

The maid, used to the unquestioning obedience of orders, when given with authority, led the way upstairs, regardless of all the proprieties, careless of etiquette. . . .

Arrived at the topmost landing, she threw open the door :

" A visitor to see you, miss," cried she, wheezy at the high climb ; admitted the handsome youth ; and forthwith took herself off, descending to her household furbishings and area gossip.

Betty, rising from her chair, set aside some needlework, and turned to greet. She saw the youth standing before the closed door, his back to it.

She put her white hands upon her bosom.

" Noll !" she whispered ; and a glad smile of wonder was in her eyes ; and the red blood flushed her cheek and lip.

Noll went to her and put his arms about her, and kissed her upon the mouth. And he said never a word.

CHAPTER XL

Which, in Somewhat Indelicate Eavesdropping Fashion, hovers about a Trysting-Place, and Scandalously Repeats a Private Conversation

In the wintry twilight that came hazing softly down upon the city, and cast its dusky shadow over St. James's Park, sat Noll on a bench, and by his side was Betty Modeyne. He sat stooped forward, elbow on knee, chin in hand, and gazed at the girl's face lovingly.

"Thou dearest heart!" said he; and she reached out her dainty gloved hand and took his within her slender fingers.

"Betty," said he, "you have brought delight to me again—the day and night are full of song and all the world is grown musical —you paint the very greys of life with colour. I am glad to be alive —for you feed my eyes with dreams of you and my senses with the fragrance of you. It would be enough to be alive, but you have filled me with eagerness, my bones with strength, my body with will. . . . I cannot sit idle longer, nor be content with half-life. . . . You must marry me, dear heart; and we will go to Paris and begin living splendidly and a-new."

"Hush, Noll," said she, smiling down upon him; and she stroked his hand. "We are so young, and—I am so glad——"

He laughed for love of her:

"You would not have us grow old in pretty nothingness, thou dearest of all born things," he said impatiently—"like the Man of Pallid Ideals and his little faded poetess, dreaming themselves away in a fragile world of dreams! My Betty, it cannot be."

She shook her head provokingly.

He pshawed:

"We do not live by denials alone, you sweet dreamer," said he, feeding his eyes upon her eyes—"we are here to live our life—not to shirk the living. . . . Our feet are planted on the dear brown earth, and only so may we raise our heads amongst the stars. . . . They prate of other worlds who themselves after all only judge of other worlds by the glorious life that their dullard eyes so scorn in this. . . . They hold out heavens to us! but what trumpet blast of all the sepulchral souls in heaven shall stir a man like the touch of your dear lips?"

"Sweetheart," said she—"I did not say I did not love your lips."

He laughed quietly, kissing her gloved fingers:

"Are not your very hands exquisitely fashioned but to steal away a man's heart, my Betty? Why does your white self hold me enthralled unless it be that I may love you—not the vague image of you?"

Betty laughed happily:

"Well, Noll," said she—"if you forget me as wholly as you have done these two years, I can almost bear it!"

"You were becoming obliterated, sweetheart," said he hoarsely—"yet you were not leaving me free. Other women's skirts were rustling in my ears, but your fragrance came between. Now these others are all silent—I hear only you. You must set me no dullard task of loving a vague image of you. I love you, dear heart—and I must love you. I want nothing more. I will have nothing less."

He was silent for awhile; and she held his fingers lovingly.

He roused:

"They speak gravely of the vague loves of gods and angels; but what is all their thin love to the love of a man for a woman? What do the unbodied gods know that is half so sweet as the love of a woman for a child?"

Betty smiled:

"Noll," said she—"you are wasting argument upon me—I love you."

He raised her gloved hand to his lips and kissed the warm fingers:

"I have only drifted—aimlessly," he said. "But I am done with this monk's life. This day three weeks you come with me to Paris, mated to me. And I will go through my apprenticeship to art and letters and win a wage at the same time."

"But—Noll! you must not throw away a certainty—you have an allowance——"

The young fellow's face darkened:

"I discovered from my father, only yesterday, what was the price of Wyntwarde's allowance to me—and I have written to my cousin that he may keep his money—I go my own way. . . . He is a man that stands hotly enough on the nobility of his blood; I asked him what was the benefit to me of that blood if it bound me to menial practices. I told him I would be no paid accomplice of his, or any other man's—that I will pay him back his services to me before I count myself a free man——"

"But, Noll——"

"I know what you are going to ask, Betty. No; my father and I did not part on the best of terms. I did not think that my father would have sold my freedom."

Betty sighed.

Noll heard the sigh, and came out of his brooding fit.

He took her hand:

"Nay, Betty," said he—"we must not fill this dear trysting-

place with glum ghosts. I love you, sweetheart—and I have no love for such as would rob me of you."

"But, Noll"—the tears came brimming to her eyes—"I do not want my love to be a pain to all these others."

"You have done nothing to give them pain, dear heart," said he. "They have brought their own pain. . . . Why did my father sell me? It is not you that come between us, but the shabby husk of him. . . . The last generation cannot wholly understand. Each new brood must live its own experience. Why should he put the brutalities between you and me? He is not your lover, nor can his choice of loves be mine. . . . There are limits to obedience. They have nearly starved me, body and soul—they have, by their folly, even turned my hungry eyes to the poor women of the streets. And for so poor a reason. . . . But"—he looked at her gladly—"you have won me back myself, dear heart—the world is very sweet to me this day."

She bent forward and put her dainty hand upon his cheek:

"I love you, Noll—but I wish we had not to steal our meetings."

"It is not your fault, Betty—nor mine. They force us to these secret ways. . . . I was glad to spend my boyhood openly by your side—I loved you, not knowing it. And they must needs break into our pleasant garden and put us apart—and set us brooding on the very glory they would keep us from. And now what was a pleasant glamour, by their starving of it, has burnt into flaming passion. I am no longer content to see you beautiful by my side; I must kiss you. I love you, Betty—the rest is nothing. We'll leave the reasons and the excusings to the calculating gods."

He took her hand, and pressed the fingers between his own.

And she laughed happily:

'The disreputable part of it all is that I love you for it, Noll," she said.

He arose, and gave her his hand:

"Come, Betty, I fear you may get chilled," he said; "you see"—he smiled—"I can even set love's egotism aside, when yours is the gain, and deny myself the sweetest moments——"

She gave him her hand and arose; and they walked into the twilit city together.

That night, by the candlelight in his narrow lodging, Noll wrote a letter to Paris, whereby Horace was urged to bestir himself and find rooms for a youth and his bride.

CHAPTER XLI

Which discovers something of Despised Poetry in a Waste-paper Basket

Noll, the door having closed on Betty's skirts, took his way in the darkness of the lamplit night towards Soho.

He turned to his most loyal and closest friend to secure him as witness to his marriage.

As he went, the young fellow forestalled in his mind all the questions that Gomme's searching humour might ask. Why was he going to Paris ? He scarcely knew. He had some vague idea that he must see life before the creative gift of artistry could be his. He had some even more vague idea that he would see such life in Paris. His instinct told him that life would be easier for Betty there—she would not suffer slight. He knew that life would be gayer at a far smaller price. His young blood was jumping for a change.

He must be moving—doing.

He roused at Gomme's doorway, ran up the steps, and rang the bell.

The house was in gloomy darkness, and, the door being opened, there stepped into the resulting blackness the grim grey figure of Netherby's mother.

" Ah, Mrs. Gomme, how are you?"

The youth hailed her, and entered the hall. And he added, as the door was closed behind him :

" You look unhappy, Mrs. Gomme."

The old lady sighed :

" I am feeling a little lonely, Noll."

" Isn't Netherby in?" he asked.

Her mouth shut firmly :

" No," she said.

" Gone out?"

" Gone out," she answered grimly.

" Do you know where?"

" No," she said. " He has gone to meet some fool of a girl."

Noll whistled :

" Oho !" said he.

" Quite so."

There was an uncomfortable pause.

"Who?" asked Noll.

"God only knows. But come in here, Noll," said the old lady; and led him into her little sitting-room. She lit the gas; went to her writing-table; took a rumpled piece of paper out of a drawer, and handed it to Noll.

Noll smoothed out the piece of paper, glanced at the grim old face before him from under his brows; and read:

"There's glory in my dear love's hair,
Sweet fragrance hath great part in it;
The threads have caught my feet in lair,
And tangled is my heart in it.
The beckoning laughter in her eyes
(With the shy look therein)
Now wins me to her, then denies
The sweet lips and the chin. . . ."

The old lady watched the reading keenly.

When it was finished, she said:

"I found that in his waste-paper basket."

"Oh, fie! Mrs. Gomme!"

Noll handed her back the sheet of crumpled paper.

The old lady flung it into the fire; she sat down in her arm-chair and watched it burn.

Noll smiled:

"Ah, Mrs. Gomme—when a man is in love with a woman he does not write poetry about it—he does it. When a man writes poetry about love, he is not in love with love, but with reputation."

The old lady shook her head grimly:

"If it began like *that*," said she, unheeding of arguments, and jealous, brooding still—"what must the rest have been like?"

Noll laughed, and put his hand on the old lady's shoulder:

"Ah! Mrs. Gomme—the girl has probably followed your example—you see, the last generation set such a bad example in these things. . . ."

CHAPTER XLII

Wherein we are shown an Emotional Hairdresser at Loggerheads with Destiny

It was close upon midnight when Noll, baffled in his attempt to find Gomme, his feet jigging restlessly to a new music that was in his ears, stepped it out through London town, as a man will go on the eve of momentous decision in his life, to visit the old haunts of his boyhood.

As he came into the street where had been his old home, he wondered whether his mother lay asleep—what she was doing—what thinking.

He saw a light in her rooms ; walked across the street ; halted before the door, half inclined to take her into his delight——

In the black shadows flung by the street lamp there sat in a huddle on the topmost doorstep the silent figure of a man.

Noll bent forward and peered at him :

" Devlin ?"

The barber nodded ; he was very pale.

He attempted to speak—uttered a rending hiccup—and was still.

" What are you doing here ?"

Devlin hiccupped :

" Sittin' on my—mistress's—doorstep."

" Why ?"

" To cool the ferment of my imagination," said the barber sadly.

Noll laughed :

" What's the matter with your imagination?" he asked. " It looks all right."

" It's torrid——"

" Oho !"

His pale face nodded :

" Quite so—quite damned torrid," said the hairdresser, and hiccupped fearsomely. " It ferments."

" Rather unpleasant !" said Noll.

" On the contr'y," said the barber—" quite pleasant. . . . It's in the morning my head will be bursting."

" Very awkward indeed !" said Noll drily, humouring him.

"Of awkward I know nothing," said the barber—"but it will be more than unpleasant when the cock-y-doo's begin their—hiccup—morning song. Damn this hiccup!"

"Come, Devlin—wake up!"

Devlin laughed sadly:

"I wish them lamps would stop sliding down the street. Would you mind," said he—"I'm afraid it's a great trouble I'm putting ye to—would you mind givin' me your arm?"

"Why?"

Devlin blinked:

"The man who is intoxicated with love should avoid mixing his intoxication with spirits. . . . I want to take my head carefully in both hands and put it in yon horse-trough."

"Don't be an ass, Devlin," said Noll, and sat down beside him on the step. "What's the meaning of all this?"

The barber coughed:

"It's anarchic I am—and filled with philosophic gloom," he said. "It's rollin' round the intestines of me——"

"Oho! This is serious indeed!"

"It is. . . . It's damn terrible. . . . I'm all at sea—like a great bumping motor-cart going down a great slithery waterfall."

"Bad as that?" said Noll.

"It's worse than that," said Devlin, and hiccupped. "I wish I could get rid of this damn hiccup," he added irritably—"it nearly pushes me off the steps each time."

"Well, Devlin—can nothing be done for you?"

"It can. And I'm doing it."

"What?"

"I'm face to face with my great hairy destiny, and, begod, I've hit it and floored it."

"But that is rather rough treatment of your destiny!"

"The divil take it, yes. I've kicked it out of my life."

Noll put his hand on the other's shoulder:

"Come, Devlin," he said—"let us have good honest talk. What's the trouble between you and your destiny?"

Devlin coughed:

"Well, sir; it's this way." He tried to tell off the points under discussion upon his fingers; but, missing his aim, he sadly gave up gesticulation, and put his hands in his pockets. "Ye see, sir, life is only once for the living. That's a square fact on a fine solid foundation. Even the Presbyterians, God forgive them, can't get round that with any number of testimonials—nor the Methodies can't leap that obstruction. . . . Well, that's so anyway. That's the sort of statement on which all the churches meet—the sort of statement that don't strain the bowels of any tax-payin' householder to grip between his two fists and look at with the two unblinking eyes in his head. . . . Now, I, Mike Devlin, said to myself—hiccup—said I—why should this whole mortal journey of me be passed in cuttin' the stray bits of hair off every damned fool whose hair grows? and wid that, up gets Echo on his hind legs in the dirty old shop and answers: why

indeed ? . . . Then, by the holy army of martyrs, up comes the trump of doom and starts buglin' in me ears like the leadin' trombone in the band of a travellin' circus : Mike, me boy, says the trump, there'll be a funeral one day, and the shabby section of the world that lives in your dirty old sooty street will be passing by the ugly corpse of ye, one by one, and they'll stare at the damn comical old relics of ye, and say : And this man was contint to crawl through life and sneak into his grave clippin' the hair off the head of any ass every week, rain or sunshine, for a triflin' and mean remuneration ! . . . And wid that, I scratched me head, and thinks Mike Devlin to himself. thinks he : begod, it's a queer kind of poetry ye're livin', says he ; and wid that he up and kicked me destiny in the intestines and drapped the hair-cuttin'."

"When was that, Devlin?"

Devlin hiccupped :

"It might have been three days ago ; and it might have been less ; but it seems a godlike fortnight av dreams interspersed wid hiccup and one or two nightmares, Mr. Noll."

"And what are you going to do, Devlin?"

"Live," said the emotional hairdresser splendidly.

"Hoho !" said Noll.

"I mean to live—to take the stage in the drama of life," said the barber largely ; and he swept his hand towards the pitchy reek of the slumbering universe. "There's a great hairy soul in me, tearin' to get out—and it's above hair-cuttin'. I am moved with the spirit of art." He hiccupped, apologized, and went on : "I have joined me life with the legitimate drama—I mean to dance the mighty fling of man's destiny to the tune of a nightly orchestra. I go out to-morrow wid a theatrical company to play the immortal masterpieces of Mr. Sheridan, Doctor Goldsmith, and the Swan of Avon. And, by the gospels, Victoria May Alice goes with me."

Noll whistled.

Devlin scowled :

"That's so," said he. "It's an ignominious destiny she's got a holt of—cleanin' the boots of mediocrities and lodgers. . . . I've been christenin' the great event all week wid the heavy man of the company—but I lost the fellow about Tuesday——"

Noll coughed :

"And—er—is Victoria May Alice to be your lawfully wedded wife, Devlin?"

"Well, sir—of course it would have been more dramatic not. I've struggled with the damned poetry in me ; but, in case of the children comin', I thought I'd have a commonplace corner in me destiny and the marriage certificate." He leaned over confidentially. "Ye see, sir—no one in the profession need know."

Noll nodded :

"And—er—what part are you to play, Devlin?"

"I begin as baggage man," he said loftily—"risin' to great parts according to me genius."

"And Victoria May Alice?"

"Next to being married to me," he said with dignity—"begad it's wardrobe mistress she starts at—straight away—wid a chance of walkin' on the boards as a silent duchess if the leadin' lady's understudy gits the nervous prostration. . . . By the glory of God, as the heavy man says, it's a great life—wid great chances—excitin' as a dog-fight, wid the great passions jostlin' each other in the seat of yer emotions, like a blurry tom-cat knockin' the ornamental feathers out of a barndoor fowl."

CHAPTER XLIII

Wherein we catch a Glimpse of the Benefits that accrue to a Sound Commercial Education

Sir Pompey Malahide's old rival was in all the agony of writing a letter, and neither Isaac Tankerton Wollup's fat little hands with the grasping pointed finger-tips, nor his bulky body, nor his spelling, aided too well in the recording of his talents on paper. The company promoter held a cigar between the forefinger and second of the hand that held down the sheet of paper to the desk, and he blew and drew the breath of his body whistling through a thick nose as he snored over his labour :

" Dear Samuel " (he writes to his friend the money-lender at Oxford)—" Nephew Reuben McCubbie whispers me that the old lord has done the handsome thing by the young Baddlesmere cub ; and that is as I said it should be. By the Christian gods, I should have been a minor prophet in the clear air of Jerusalem, and might even have got into the Talmud—but we live in dull days. London's a sooty hole when all is said—even intellect shows dimly, except on the Stock Exchange. Greatness has to bump against the neck of the Anglo-Saxon race before the Anglo-Saxon race sees it. Therefore I am neglected.

But I am worried just now with the details of an affair that forces itself upon me even more prominently than my obesity.

My great illustrated paper has now been going for nigh six months. All the little pen-and-ink gods of criticism agree that it is the most artistic, the most brilliant, the best produced thing in the market—all agree even more that it has shown up the tawdry vulgarity of Pompey Malahide's literary debauches. But—it has cost ten thousand pun ! ! ! ! ! Please note the hysterisks. It's quite as bad as all that. Not a one of the artists has been paid—nor not a one of the literary gents. I was not born for nothing—nor the bankruptcy laws made to thwart commercial genius. I got them to go in on sharing terms for the first six months—the profit as well as the risk to be theirs instead of going into the pockets of sordid city men. See ? I played the full brass band of self-interest to their conceit and greed—which,

Samuel, I fear is at the bottom of much human nature, even outside Judea. Well, the trade is a-owing to the harmonious tune of eight thousand pun. And the trade has decided to stop the concern and divide what shilling in the poundage is owing thereto.

I am the trade. See ?

The McCubbie syndicate. See ?

I don't appear. See ?

So don't you burst into tears for me. I lured the boys with dreams beyond avarice—I showed them Pomp Malahide and the girls driving by ! They gave their genius whole—like the gentlemen they are.

Well, we have failed to elevate journalism. It must lapse back into its old sordid channels.

Meanwhile, I am about to put in a bailiff in the name of the McCubbie printing syndicate upon the carved oak chest in the hall of our superior friend, Bartholomew Doome—that lordly person, being always backed with money in some mysterious way, having confessed, pathetic fact, that he had absolutely no settled income beyond what he makes from year to year by the exercise of his talents. Not that I have anything against the youth—I rather like the Nobs ; but them tapestries ! real goblins, my boy ! they are mine. . . . And the pictures ! Bouchers are running into five figures at the sale-rooms ; Samuel, they are mine. And as for the Watteau—what ho ! *And* the Adams and Chippendale and Louis furniture and the whole splendid treasure ! You could almost kiss it, Samuel—well, I think that we are going to get our eight thousand back, God be praised. But it will be the Sabbath in seven minutes, so I must cease from honest labour—and I prepare to do so in a reverent spirit, for it is one of the brightest Friday afternoons I have spent since you and me played marbles in the Minories.

God be merciful to you a sinner.

Yours, in the plentitude of my powers,

I. Tankerton Wollup."

When, in the early morning, Fluffy Reubens, yawning in a loose dressing-gown as he shuffled along muttering guttural curses at the violent ringing of the bell, opened the outer door of Doome's studio, and thrust out a tousled head, a melancholy man came in with the milk, walked gloomily to the oak chest in the hall, and took possession.

Fluffy Reubens shut the door, went over to the seated man, and, thrusting his hands deep into the pockets of his dressing-gown, and straddling out his legs, stood and gazed at him :

" Whee-hee-hewy-hewy-hewy !" whistled he.

The cadaverous sickly-looking fellow on the oak chest, watching him suspiciously out of anxious eyes, searched in the breast pocket of his dingy coat, and handed him a sheet of blue paper.

Fluffy Reubens kicked it out of his hand ; and the sickly person ducked his head and raised a defensive elbow :

" Chuck it, guv'nor," he said hoarsely—and coughed.

"Don't talk slang!" said Fluffy Reubens. "What's your name?"

"Sickers," said the sickly person.

"Who gave you that name?"

"What are yer gettin' at, guv'nor?"

"Well, look here, Sick Horse——" "By thunder, sick-horse is good." And he added: "Who are you?"

"A bailiff, sir."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I am."

"Well?"

"I'm getting used to shame, guv'nor." The man was seized with a fit of coughing.

"You look beastly nervous, Sick-horse. You'd think I was going to kick you from behind."

Sickers sighed gloomily:

"The last gentleman did," he said hoarsely; and added, with a dry throat: "It's a very assailable calling, sir."

"Look here, Sick-horse," said Reubens—"I want you to go out and send a telegram for me."

"Oh, no, you don't, guv'nor." The man smiled cunningly, laughing a husky laugh.

"Why not?"

"Well—yer see, guv'nor—when I've got my back on a oak chest—well—I know where I are."

Reubens laughed loud and long:

"You ass," roared he—"I've only got slippers on."

"I'd rather not, guv'nor—if yer don't mind."

Fluffy Reubens gazed at him:

"Sick-horse," said he, "don't move. I'll be back again in a minute. Stay like that for awhile—you look terrific in that light—sort of Judas Iscariot in the gloom wishing to God he hadn't taken the money."

He strolled off into the great studio and returned with a canvas and painting materials, and a large yellow official paper. He put the things on the floor, drew up a chair, and, shading his eyes with his hand, tried several views of the uncomfortable man.

Sitting down at last, he began rapidly, with swift telling strokes of colour, to sketch in an impression of the dejected figure before him where he sat in the deep shadows of the ill-lit place.

"By the way, Sick-horse," said he—"I suppose I must put you down in the census-paper—you are going to stay the night, of course."

"Ye—yes, sir," said the man.

"So am I—Mr. Doome has lent me his studio, so let us begin. We've got your name and your calling. Are you of unsound mind?"

The man laughed huskily:

"You needn't put it at that, sir," said he.

"You've got a fizzing fine suicidal look on you, when you don't smile, Sick-horse," said Fluffy, painting away. "I've been pining for a good Judas Iscariot for years. . . . Don't shift

more than you can help. . . . Oh, about the census. Are you married?"

The pale-faced man nodded gloomily—he was.

"Tut, tut! How dreadful!" said Fluffy. "No wonder you're ashamed of yourself. What's become of the wife?"

"She's alive," he said gloomily.

Fluffy Reubens coughed:

"No luck," said he. "Any children?"

"Fourteen."

"Good God!" said Fluffy Reubens.

"I don't always think so, guv'nor," said the melancholy figure from the shadows.

Reubens painted in silence for a long time. At last he got up and looked keenly at the man:

"Empty?" he asked.

The bailiff nodded—yes, he was very empty—he was always empty—he was used to it.

"Look here, Sick-horse, you look so damn dramatic I must not put anything into you for half an hour yet—I haven't quite finished. But after that we'll have breakfast, eh?"

The man smiled.

Fluffy Reubens jumped up, upsetting his canvas:

"For God's sake, don't do that!" cried he anxiously; "or we're lost. . . . Quick! think of something else—think the coffee's burnt—think the eggs are addled——"

He flung down his brush:

"Damnation! Judas Iscariot is dead," he said.

He went to the hall-door, bawled for the woman who looked after the house, and ordered breakfast from an eating-house close by:

"For two," he called.

He gathered up the painting things sadly, to carry them into the great studio.

The gloomy man on the oak chest coughed:

"I'm real sorry, guv'nor; I'll try the God-forsaken lay again," said the wretched man huskily; "but I wish to God you hadn't mentioned them sausages."

"No," said Fluffy Reubens—"it would never be the same thing—and I haven't the heart to kick you—even if it brought back Judas Iscariot."

Later in the morning, Fluffy Reubens wrote a telegram to Bartholomew Doome:

"Bailiff in possession. Order a supper for about thirty here this evening. Whisk round London in cab and make all the boys come to an orgy. The bailiff looks ripping in that gorgeous livery out of your property wardrobe. The shoes do not fit, but his elastic-sided boots look stunning quaint at the end of the white stockings. Was afraid I'd never get his feet through the legs of the red plush breeches. I will do the rest.

FLUFFY."

He wrote another to Rippley.

CHAPTER XLIV

Wherein a Palace of Art disappears in the Night

Bartholomew Doome's great studio was in a haze with the smoking of much tobacco ; and it were almost as though the lolling figures had smoked in church.

The tapestried walls showed sombrely rich, their glowing colour only half revealed by the ghostly light of the huge white candles that flamed on high, held aloft by great gilt candlesticks the heavily wrought feet of which stood reflected on the dark-stained floor. And the handsome sheaves of crystal lustres that hung from the ceiling glittered and sparkled aloft like hundreds of precious gems.

The beautiful image of the Mary and the spangled ikons of the Russian Church, which stood on the suavely carved mantel, flanked by the pastel of a ballet-girl by Degas, and a frail nude beauty by Manet, gleamed mysterious—religious.

Before the mantel, on huge iron dogs, was set a scarlet coffin.

On the scarlet coffin sat Bartholomew Doome.

About the room, seated at tables, young fellows were bawling a drinking chorus.

Before Doome stood the weak-kneed figure of the bailiff, gorgeous in an ill-fitting livery that was a world too capacious for his meagre body.

As the drunken fellow held the tankard of beer aloft he made a supreme effort to take a last high note—his voice cracked—he spilled the liquor on his upraised face, spluttered, coughed, tripped over his own feet, and fell—amidst a shout of laughter and loud cries of " Encore " from the assembled throng.

Rippley and Fluffy Reubens carried the fallen man to a sofa and laid him upon it.

There was a lull in the riot ; and in the lull there arose from his chair, unsteadily, the figure of Ponsonby Wattles Ffolliott, rather the worse for drink. Holding a glass in his hand, he straddled over to Doome, where he sat on the scarlet coffin, and he uttered a silly laugh as he brought his vague legs to an unsteady halt.

" Hullo, Ffolliott !" cried Doome. " What is it?"

Ffolliott blew through dry red lips :

" Civilization," said he, with a racking hiccup—" civilization (hiccup) has its drawbacks."

"Yes, Ffolliott." Doome laughed. "Civilization has its drawbacks—there is the hand mirror."

Ffolliott came nearer, and, disregarding the insinuation, added with drunken confidence:

"D'you know, Doome—you don't mind my saying so—but I believe you're engaged."

"Nonsense, Ffolliott!"

Doome got up from his grim bench and slapped the weak-limbed exquisite a sounding thump on the narrow shoulders with heavy jocular hand's buffet, so that he spilled the liquor down the front of him.

Ffolliott, when he had wiped himself dry with dandified handkerchief, said:

"Oh—it's no use your pretending to be so colossally gay, you know. I always notice that when a fellow makes a delirious fool of himself (hiccup) about a woman (hiccup) he becomes austere—morally austere."

"Hiccup!" said Rippley; and there was loud applause at the tables.

Doome laughed:

"You were always a comic ass, Ffolliott," said he—"but when did you degenerate into a philosopher?"

"Oh, yes—get me off the rails, of course! But I always notice that when a fellow makes a delirious fool of himself about a woman (hiccup)—fool enough, I mean, to become engaged—he becomes mollar'ly (hic)—mollarly austere."

"Oh, damn!" said Doome.

Ffolliott raised drunken eyelids:

"But saying damn can go with great moral austerity." He paused and uttered a giggle. "That's an epigram, I think," he said.

"What on earth are you jabbering about, Ffolliott?"

Ffolliott stuck to his theme with drunken persistence.

"A fellow who is engaged doesn't seem to laugh at the same places in the *comedy of life* that he laughs at before he is engaged."

"Get on, Ffolliott—get on. You talk like Euclid trying to invent a comic song."

Ffolliott blinked:

"I've always noticed," said he—"that a fellow does not become really austere until he is engaged. . . ." He sighed heavily. "I know such a good chap, who's become engaged. He used to read the *Pink Un*; but now he reads *The Descent of Man*."

"Shush!" said Doome impatiently.

Ffolliott giggled:

"D'you know," said he—"I started to tell him such a comic story to-day—by George, I'll tell it to *you*," he tittered. "You know how ridiculous a woman with a pronounced nose looks in a bathing-dress! Well. But—perhaps I'd better not tell you—I'm *sure* you're engaged——"

Doome slapped the narrow shoulders again with jovial hand, and sent more liquor flying down Ffolliott's trousers:

"By Hermes, you are a clever fellow, Ffolliott," said he.

"Oh, no—not always," bleated the affected voice of Ffolliott—

" I'm rather deliriously clever at times—in a flukey sort of way. I don't mean to be. It's hereditary. My mother's uncle was a rural dean, you know, and——"

" But why do you wear an eyeglass?"

Ffolliott simpered :

" Foljambe of Baliol was the most pronounced man at the 'varsity ; he is the most pronounced man at the bar—and Foljambe wears an eyeglass."

" *Does* he?"

" Rather," bleated Ffolliott. " And though, between you and me (hiccup), Foljambe's a conceited ass, he is rather a remarkable ass ; and I don't know whether you have noticed it (hiccup), but in these days it takes rather a clever fellow to be a *remarkable* ass."

Doome smote Ffolliott a rollicking buffet, that sent more liquor down his trousers :

" By the Greek gods," cried Doome, " we are having a roaring evening, eh? Hang me, we are only bachelors once—so we'll make gay whilst the moon shines. Damn it, you shall sing."

" Oh, yes ; I'll sing. I can't—but I will——"

Fluffy Reubens came up and pushed Ffolliott aside roughly :

" Hist !" said he—" Doome, the bailiff's asleep. . . ." He turned round and called in a loud whisper : " Rippley !"

" 'Ullo !"

" Have you got the furniture vans all ready?"

" Yes."

" Where are they?"

" In my studio," said Rippley. " I hope to Jupiter the horses haven't knocked the stuffing out of my stattoos. I tipped the men to stay all night."

" Splendid ! Get 'em round, Rip, quick—by the back way, and into the court here—the door of the dressing-room opens into the court, and was made for taking big pictures through. There's not a moment to lose."

Rippley hurried out of the room.

" Quick, boys—one of you lock the hall door after Rippley !" cried Fluffy Reubens hoarsely ; " we've got to pack out the whole parcel of toys in a couple of hours."

He flung off his coat, and began to roll up a great Persian carpet.

In the early morning, the sleeping bailiff was roused by a rude hand upon his shoulders.

" Get up !" said a rough voice.

He sat up, untidy, frowsy, weak-eyed, snuffling and grumbling n the ridiculous gorgeousness of the ill-fitting livery.

He rubbed his eyes :

" God !" said he hoarsely.

His jaw dropped ; and he stared miserably round the room.

Before him stood the vulgar over-dressed figure of Mr. Isaac Tankerton Wollup, with his choleric eyes fixed upon him, bullock-like, bloodshot :

"You blighter!" said Mr. Isaac Tankerton Wollup.

The miserable man rubbed his drowsy eyes—he rubbed them again. His mouth was too dry to utter speech.

He was sitting on the top of a scarlet coffin, that stood on two chairs; and, with the solitary exception of these things, the room was wholly empty of furnishment.

He burst into tears.

"You bleating idiot!" The vulgar dealer's eyes snapped contempt. "The house is empty as a money-lender's unwritten promise. They loaded the vans in the night; and you slept through it all! . . . Get your legs out o' the light!"

He struck the lean shins with his cane.

The poor abject fellow cried out, and, rising, like a whipped cur he slunk across the room, buried his face in his arm, and sobbed against the wall.

The bloodshot eyes of the company-promoter, as he stooped down putting his thick hands on his great fat thighs, peered at the white paint on the side of the scarlet coffin; there had been no haste, every letter was balanced and well-drawn, and the whole phrase told decoratively on the scarlet lacquer: *Art in England is dead*, it said. *Try France.*

The little fat man laughed harshly. He shook his head:

"I don't know how the Beelzebub I shall break this musical comedy to Samuel. . . . Overreached in my own business and by a Christian!"

He walked gloomily out of the place.

* * * * * *

After the irate dealer had departed, his miserable bailiff ceased his sobbing against the wall, took off the gorgeous coat, and staunched his tears on the sleeve of his tattered shirt. He was a broken figure of dejection—blear-eyed, weak-kneed, ragged, snuffling.

He changed into his old clothes, went and seated himself on the scarlet coffin, and crouched there, a woe-begone wonderer in despair.

He burst into tears.

He put his grimy hand into the side-pocket of his greasy coat for a handkerchief—it struck against a sheet of paper.

He blew his nose on a rag, soiled to mud-colour, unfolded the paper, and read it:

"*If you should be dismissed from employment, communicate with Sir Pompey Malahide's butler, who will see to it that you do not suffer. Don't forget to call him my lord. Ecod, you sang like a damned canary.*"

CHAPTER XLV

Wherein a Poet burns his Verse to keep his Feet Warm

In the waning of a bleak March day, Betty walked briskly home to her rooms. It was the eve of her marriage. Noll and she were to go to Paris straight from the ceremony. Betty had the tickets for the journey in her pocket. Horace had secured them lodgings.

When the girl had entered the house, mounting the stairs to her attic, she felt a pang. She was going to a glorious life, and leaving the old home to increasing dinginess—it would become shabbier and more shabby ; whilst she—stepped it blithely to the seven heavens.

And the little faded Miss Flora ! Who was to tend her? . . .

The mirth went out of her heart.

Someone must always suffer.

She stopped at the door, and knocked.

She had some flowers at her belt—she would leave them for the little lady—she must see her again before she went. More——

She must break the tidings.

She knocked again—the knock of indecision.

Not a sound.

She opened the door gently, and entered.

In the room, in her old-world taffeta-covered chair, before the fire, very still, sat Miss Flora Jennyns ; and the girl knew by the quick instinct within her that Death waited at the window.

About the narrow shoulders was drawn the India shawl, the weary hand holding the overlapping ends at the withered throat ; and on the third finger of the hand was the ring of splendid jewels that sparkled in paint in the picture beyond her.

Here was the picture—grown old—vanishing.

And the old shoe that peeped from the crumpled threadbare skirts upon the quaint old wool-worked footstool—ah, how shabby ! worn with careful brushings—of what gentle uncomplaining penury were these things not sign and emblem !

So she sat, fading away in the winter's light, her dying eyes on the fire's warmth, and her lips smiling on her little triumphs of long ago—a little withered roseleaf, blown across the footlights of the world's rude theatre.

Betty ran to her, knelt down beside her, and touched the pale white hand that lay upon the chair's arm :

" Miss Flora !" she whispered in a strange wonder and alarm.

" Mother of God !" the old lady's lips murmured—" the child is come !"

She smiled ; put out her slender bloodless fingers, and placed them upon the girl's fresh brown hair :

" Dear sweet heart !" said she—" in my love for thee, and in thy gentleness to me, I have known something of motherhood. . . . I have not—been—wholly—barren."

Betty took the bloodless hand between hers, kissed it and chafed it. It was very cold. She could not speak for tears.

The old eyes smiled upon the girl. After a while the dying poetess added :

" Nor have I been wholly alone."

She sighed ; and, with a smile, she died.

Betty, her eyes filled with tears, put out her dainty milk-white hand, with rosy fingers, to the dead eyelids and drew down the blinds that curtained the windows of the departed soul.

In the deepening dusk, Betty went out to find Eustace Lovegood. . . . She mounted the bare creaking stairs to his lodgings, and reaching his high attic, was glad to hear his deep-voiced growl to enter at her knocking.

The big man, in a threadbare dressing-gown, arose, with his wonted grand manner, to welcome her ; and when he saw who was his visitor his heavy face was lighted with a smile :

" Mistress Betty !" said he—" by all that's charming !"

He came to her and, the greetings over, with courtly etiquette led her to his chair—it was the only one in all the bare room.

" You look serious," he said—" sit down and tell me."

Betty hesitated :

" There is something on fire—a smell of paper burning," she said.

Lovegood laughed his big laugh :

" I am making coffee," he said.

She saw that the kettle in the narrow fireplace was being heated by burning balls of crumpled manuscript.

" But why do you heat the kettle with paper?" she asked.

He smiled drily :

' Ah, Betty—you push me to the extremity of truth. Well, it is because I have nothing else to burn. . . . Only my rejected poems. And I am badly in need of the coffee. The weather is very severe."

Betty's eyes filled with tears :

" I am sorry," she said.

" Tut, tut ! you mustn't damp the spirits of the kettle, Betty—it begins to boil. . . . Wonderfully heating thing—poetry !"

He went to the kettle.

" You shall have first brew," he added—" that you may never again despise coffee warmed by the passionate glow of verse. . . .

There is a dearth of cups—and my landlady has a gouty leg—and the journeyings of the little maid-of-all-work make my heart ache —but I usurp the news."

As the big man busied himself with his hospitalities, Betty told him of her errand—begged him to come back with her and give his counsel and aid.

He was for going straight away; but she insisted on sitting there until he had drunk his coffee.

At the threshold, across the steps of the house, in the twilight of the silent street, lay the dead body of the Man of Pallid Ideals —a nosegay of pale flowers near his gloved hand, his white face turned upwards to the still skies, lit by the pale light of the mystic moon.

He had seen the drawn blinds—guessed their significance—gone to her doors, stunned with dread—fallen in the moment of his last act of homage. . . .

OF THE BLOSSOMING OF THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

CHAPTER XLVI

Wherein the Husband of the Concierge fears that he is growing Blind

DARKNESS was stealing over the city, and Paris was taking a drowsy breath in the twilight before awakening to her evening gaiety and frolic mood.

In her narrow old grey streets, many-shuttered, which huddle about the broad Boule Miche that is the students' highway on the left bank of the river—in the time-honoured Latin quarter—over against the Ile de la Cité, there stands a narrow way where artists do largely abide. In the whitest house of the block, or the one that at least attempts the nearest to approach a dingy suggestion of whiteness, where at any rate whiteness is become less a bygone tradition than with the rest of its fellows down the length of the alley, there stood at its topmost window, his hands behind his back, and in pensive fashion, a handsome young fellow in the slouched black hat and short black coat, flowing tie, and baggy brown corduroy pantaloons of the student of Paris ; but the yellow hair was the hair of Horace Malahide.

His brooding eyes were on the end of the alley, where in the reek of the lilac dusk Paris glittered her myriad lamps, her flaming streets sweeping away into the shadow of the night, showing afar dim sparks of fire that winked up the heights and were lost in the purple firmament, where a white star trembled into liquid light above the gaunt scaffolding of the huge basilica a-top of the distant hill of Montmartre.

A cracked voice in the dark room asked :

" Monsieur wishes that I shall light the candle ?"

Before the brooding youth at the window gave answer, a match was struck, and discovered a little old man guarding the flame of a candle with his hand. The old fellow set the candle on a table.

Horace turned, with a sigh, into the room, sat down on a chair, and pushed back his hat ; he came down into the world.

" Husband of concierges," said he——

The little old man, with skull-cap a-top, coughed, held out a protesting hand :

" Pardon, monsieur—husband of *the* concierge !"

Horace laughed :

"Husband of the concierge of concierges," said he—and he held out a jewelled box of cigarettes—"we will smoke—to disinfect the room."

The old shoulders rose in the shrug of protest:

"Good God, monsieur, the room is absolutely polished"—the shoulders swore it—"clean as a dish—not a grain of dust. I said it should be so. I did not trust the *femme de ménage* alone. I did it myself."

Shoulders and arms and hands, all bore confirmatory evidence.

Horace nodded:

"Smoke," said he. "It is an honour to smoke with so clean a husband of concierges."

The old man laughed, shook his head, and shuffling to Horace's side, took a cigarette:

"Ah, monsieur the student he is always gay—always gay. He has always his joke against his concierge. . . . I have known students for thirty years—and who would have it otherwise? When students fall away from joy of life they take to believing too much in themselves, and cross the river to Montmartre, and drink absinthe, and die, and are buried."

"Come, my husband of concierges," cried Horace, "don't let us weep. Light all the candles, and let us see what the room looks like——"

"But, monsieur, not all the candles?"

"Certainly! certainly! . . . This is the last rehearsal, my old veteran; they *arrive* to-morrow. . . . Light up, man—light up!"

The old man shuffled about the room in his thick felt slippers, setting candles aflame until the place was a blaze of light.

Horace's eyes went over the details of the room.

"Those rogues sent a fresh new bed, eh? You saw to that, eh?"

"The sommier was as monsieur had ordered it—ab-so-lu-ment." The old man stopped in the midst of lighting a last candle to point to the couch-ottoman that is the student's lounge by day and bed by night.

Horace nodded:

"Good! . . . The rest of the furniture, though not too profuse, looks far from too new. We showed taste in our choice, my old veteran. Now, you will not forget your lesson? Monsieur Horace has sent what he did not want from his own studio; but there was no stove nor towels, and you have taken the liberty to buy a stove and a dozen towels which were a bargain and they only cost you twelve francs! God forgive me! You have it all in your head, all under that embroidered cap, my husband of concierges, eh?"

The old man bowed, shrugged his shoulders, and held out his open palms in the protest of indignation:

"Has monsieur yet known me to forget anything?"

Horace blew out a cloud of smoke, frowning at his thoughts. . . .

He put his hand in the breast-pocket of his coat and drew out a bundle of banknotes. He beckoned the old man to him; put five of them into his hand, and shut the old fingers upon them:

"My friend," said he, putting his hand on the old fellow's shoulder—"there will always be here, early every morning for an hour or so, a woman, *une femme de ménage*, to make beds and brush and sweep and keep things tidy—besides, you and madam will, I know, have business up in this part of the house—at times that will just happen to be useful to the young lady who is coming here. There will be water wanted, and breakfast rolls and milk and things. And—I shall not forget that you do not forget them."

The old man nodded, smiled.

"I will have business on the sixth floor morning and evening, monsieur," he said—"and my wife also; I know of an excellent woman."

"Good! . . . Now put out the lights."

The old man shuffled round the room, and blew out the candles. . . .

They locked the door and went down the stairs together.

Horace turned suddenly on the first landing:

"Husband of concierges—we have forgot the baths."

"Mon Dieu, monsieur—yes."

"They will be there to-morrow?"

"It will be there to-morrow, m'sieu."

"They—my veteran—they! *Two* baths."

"They shall be there, m'sieu."

Horace ran down the stairs; called "Good-night!" and was gone.

The old man scratched his head:

"My God!" said he; "how these English are always washing! That will be two extra cans to carry up."

That night as Hodendouche, the once Sergeant of cavalry, joined his plump little mate in the bed that took up the greater part of that small room in the gateway, on the ground floor where concierges have their habitation, he blew out the candle.

"That is you!" said the stout little woman sleepily.

The old fellow chuckled:

"Thou didst not dream it was the President of the Republic, my Marie?" said he, and cackled again. "If so, I like not thy complacency."

She turned to the wall.

"Marie," said he—"the *Petit Journal* lies. The English are not *canaille*. . . . He gave me five hundred francs. . . . Our little Aloysius shall go on with his studies. . . . The *Petit Journal* lies."

"Tsh! Hodendouche! Thou art grown garrulous. Get thee into thy nightcap and to sleep. Thou fool! he loves the woman."

There was a long silence.

"Mon Dieu!" said the old man—"yes, indeed. My eyesight is not what it was."

CHAPTER XLVII

Which introduces us to the First Lady of France

A PADDLE-STEAMER cleared the long wooden jetties, and made Boulogne Harbour, hooting the announcement of her coming to the echoing wharves that flung back the chuckling hoot in answering welcome rollickingly; and, churning with fussy thrashings of her paddle-wheels the waters of the narrow sea-way as she settled to her moorings, she lurched against the quay and was still.

To Betty and Noll, standing on deck with eyes bent on the swinging prospect before them, there came the fragrance of a new world. The tender greys, gentle blues, and silvery colours of France held out a welcome to their ready senses, and from the many-windowed houses with their hundred wooden shutters there drifted the pleasant odour of wood fires.

So Betty, her happy eyes glancing at the shifting scenes that passed by the wayside, and lolling in the grey carriage of her wedding journey, was whirled through the pleasant garden of France.

Noll came and sat beside her.

"You're very happy, my Betty," said he.

She nodded—and her eyes filled with tears.

She put out her hand shyly to him, and he held it in his. He sat and watched her. It was stupid to speak. . . .

They swung past great sand-dunes by the sea—along the pleasant plains with poplars all of a row—thundered over bridges that spanned the shining river—clanked past villages—passing now and then a picturesque château on a hilltop that stood sentry over the plains—and always there was the sense of grey-green trees and white buildings and tender blue skies that are the colour of France. Delicacy and tenderness and graciousness and gentleness are written over the face of the land, the subtle land of Corot. And all the world was a-singing. . . .

In the twilight the train dashed past St. Denis and the foundries of Paris, swept under the lea of the hill where the scaffolding a-top showed the building of the great church of Montmartre, and thundered into the resounding grey gateway of the city that stands open to the north—the Gare du Nord.

At the barriers they were met by a French student in black slouch hat and great loose tie full flowing at the throat through the open collar of his short black coat—he wore baggy corduroy pantaloons. The golden-haired youth slapped Noll on the shoulder, pulled off his hat, and held out a hand to Betty—welcoming them to Paris. And Horace Malahide's warm hand-shake brought a glow of happiness to them both. His laugh sent all the strangeness flying; they were no longer alone amid an alien people.

Horace, giving Noll a hand with the small baggage, called a porter and told him to hail a cab. The blue-bloused fellow soon had the scanty baggage stowed away on top. Horace smiled a little sadly at the girl's trunk and the narrow extent of Noll's belongings.

As they drove off together, Horace explained:

"Now, I've got you a room, right at the top, in one of the most delightful houses of the old student quarter. I have sent some of my surplus furniture; but I had to get the concierge to buy you a stove and one or two things."

He laughed aside all thanks; then he coughed—a little embarrassedly:

"Of course—I told all the boys that you were coming—with a wife, Noll. But the Frenchmen all winked at the word wife; so they'll be quite friendly and free."

Horace was to show them everything and put them in the way of pleasant economies.

In the morning he was to move down from his old studio on Montmartre to be near them. Noll was to share his studio, when he was in the mood to paint—Horace was at Gérôme's atelier at the Beaux Arts.

The cab was rattling along the riverside—lurched aside and rattled over a bridge—turned along the quays—up a narrow thoroughfare—took a jolting turn or two—and came to a noisy standstill.

They got out, and walked through a high entrance into a cobbled courtyard. And as they passed, to give them rude welcome, out of a doorway that was a hole in the wall of the passage-way popped the stout little woman who is the symbol and the tyrant and ultimate design created by the machinery of the French constitution—the concierge.

Horace introduced them.

As they mounted the stairs to their first home, Horace discoursed on the panting woman who led the way—in English.

The concierge, said he, is the government. The President of the Republic is but her servant. Her newspaper has the greatest circulation in the world—is the furthest reaching—*Le Petit Journal*. She stands between the landlord and the tenant—that is her sole duty—and she stands on her duty. She has usurped power as the Carlovingian mayors of the palace plucked

the sceptre from their Merovingian kings, the Rois Fainéants of France. She is dragon over all the moralities—you may commit any sin in France, if you do it gracefully, except shocking the concierge. At eleven o' the night she shuts the gates, and gets to bed—and when you ring the bell for admittance, she pulls the bolts by magic from that bed, scarce turning to break her snore, and you as you pass must call your name—or you are lost. In her smile or in her frown lies your honour, your repute, your good name. . . . France one fine morning awoke, and her sunny smile died out, scared by the threat of Revolution. Paris talked in anxious whispers. Paris frowned. For on the walls of the Rue de Rivoli was writ *Long Live the King!* At mid-day Paris was laughing—the concealed troops marched out of the courtyards and went home; the revolution was over: beneath *Long Live the King*, a workman, mounting the shoulders of another, had writ: "*Which?*" killing the danger with a jest. . . . At midnight Paris was a riot of dancing—a third wag had written full answer to the sphinx: *Le concierge.*

Arrived at the heights, Horace bade the lights to be lit, and when their home was all ablaze with welcome, he handed Betty the key, wished them happiness, and took his leave until the morning.

CHAPTER XLVIII

Which has to do with the Motherhood of the World

A CLOCK struck five.

The sun rose out of the grey mists of the east and flecked with golden light the upper stories of the white-faced city.

Betty roused at the noises of the awakening street below—footsteps—the clink of bottles in which young women bore the morning's milk to the court—then low voices that gossiped drowsily.

The disturbing sense of being in a strange bed.

The distant rumble of a cart—and more footsteps and again voices, of a pitch and accent that struck strangely upon her ear. And she knew she was awaking in a strange land.

It came to her that she was in Paris.

Paris !

She sat up in bed.

There was a dear fellow's head on the pillow beside her—he slept soundly.

And she laughed low.

She put her dainty feet out of her marriage bed, slipped their whiteness into his slippers, wrapped his warm dressing-gown about her, and went to the window.

And as the sun rose high above the city's edge, and smiled down into the dew-damp streets, there came the blithe sounds of a city awakening. The clatter of wooden shoon that entered the alley was the sound of the great black sabots in which tramped the big powerful woman in bunchy skirts who came sweeping the water down the gutters with long black broom. On the heels of her noisy passing came the rattle of a fish-barrow, pushed by a fish-girl that wailed the melancholy street-cry of mackerel. And now the court was all alive with sound—water-pails were clanking, and wooden shoon tapping along the paven way ; vintners were cleaning wine-casks, swinging iron chains in the cleansing waters of the barrels ; anvils rang under the swinging stroke of the naked-armed iron-workers ; hammers tapped ; market women and street-vendors joined their cries, musical and unmusical, to the increasing din ; and the clinking bell on the neck of a big leading short-necked Flemish horse told that the

great lumbering cart was come to carry away the city's trash. Girls selling fruit and girls selling potatoes cried their wares; and men that mended chairs. And there was the cling-clink-clink of the pavior who roughs with hammer and chisel the newly mended flagstone. And from the blanchisserie the girls thumped and ironed the white linen and sang snatches of song. And then as the clock struck eight, there came a street-seller crying chickweed for the little caged songsters; and all adown the alley the birds began to sing.

And wondrous music stirred in the girl's heart.

For the days of her chill maidenhood were departed, fallen from her like a white garment; and just as, passing from childhood, she had been roused by some unseen hand and rid of physical bondage; just as with awakening reason she had been as surely freed from intellectual bondage; so she now stood in presence of the full majesty of her womanhood, morally free. Her senses glowed, and her dainty being pulsed to a music she had not till then known—and the meaning of the book of life was laid open to her, so that with swelling throat and ecstatic bosom she was at one with the motherhood of the world.

She had brought her little hoard of twenty-seven pounds—it was the lucky number—three times three times three! She laughed happily. And that handsome fellow in her bed, Noll, had his wits and some seventy pounds a year. And they were one; and all the world lay before them. . . . Hardship! What was hardship? She had this handsome fellow to wrap her maternal arms about. Mother of God! it was luxury—riches—God's reward!

She gave herself to him with all the shy generosity of her great integrity—of her commanding virtue. . . .

Betty went back to the bed and nestled close to her love

"What is it, Bess?" he asked, rousing.

"I pity all mateless things," she said.

CHAPTER XLIX

Wherein the Rich Man's Son seeks the Sweets of Poverty—not Wholly without Success

On the northern heights of Montmartre, into a paved courtyard, where Horace Malahide had his rooms, several laughing students were carrying forth the furnishments from one of the houses, piling them in a heap on the cobbled ground. A divan was already in the handcart, and on top of the divan sat a youth whom they called Gaston, who, with a great brass French horn round about his shoulders, was solemnly sounding a faulty rendering of a quaint old hunting call.

Out of the hurly-burly tripped into the court a pretty girl, carrying a couple of hat-boxes and some airy feminine wearing apparel. She halted before the handcart in evident anxiety as to a safe place for their stowage—a perplexed frown came over her handsome face. One of the noisy young fellows, who spoke his French with a strong American accent, saw her bewilderment, plucked the musical Gaston by the heel, and brought him with a clatter to the ground, where, rubbing the back of his skull, he settled himself on a rug, and, fixing his mouth to the horn again, took up the tune where he had left off. The young American flung open the lid of the divan and stowed away inside it the girl's hat-boxes and scant wardrobe.

"That all, Babette?" he asked.

"No, mon ami—one minute!" she cried.

She skipped up the steps and disappeared into the doorway.

When she came back she was laden with linen and pillows and blankets. She laughed merrily. The young American calmly helped her to stow the things away in the divan; and she blithely skipped away again. . . .

Before her doorway, at the passage leading into the court, watching what passed with a sour scowl, stood the hard-lipped little woman who was the concierge to the court; indeed, it was this lean woman's shrewish tongue that was chiefest cause for the flitting—a clacking tongue that had wearied Horace for months. And now she had fallen foul of the girl and had slanged her from the bottom of the court with taunts and insinuations that Horace had felt compelled to put out of all remotest chance of repetition —and a restless longing to be back in the Latin quarter leaped

with his desire and hastened it. The girl was not sorry either; but she was frugally loath to forfeit the remainder of his lease. He had taken her face between his two hands and kissed her upon the mouth: "Babette," he had said—"no living soul does you an ill turn twice if I can prevent it; we leave to-morrow morning."

The act had sobered the concierge.

She was brooding upon it now. . . .

The students shut the lid of the divan and flung a rolled mattress on top; the loading went apace to the rattling musketry of quip and jest and caper.

Horace, dressed for the street, entered the courtyard and was received with a loud shout from his noisy comrades—a prolonged blare from Gaston Latour's hunting-horn—and there was silence.

Horace glanced round the court, saw that all was ready, and moved towards the concierge.

He halted before her, put his heels together, took off his hat, and bowed solemnly. Madame, he said, he felt sure, would understand and allow for his emotion on quitting her house. He handed the key into her grasping outstretched fingers, that were itching for a fee, and commended her soul to her Maker.

"He insults me!" she cried; and the students fell a-laughing.

Horace turned on his heel as the violent oaths poured from the old shrew's scolding lips; and the loud tan-tan-taras of the students and the brassy blaring of the French horn drowned the torrent of abuse.

They began to sing the *Marseillaise*.

Horace walked calmly over to the handcart, took off his coat and hat, gave them to the girl, and getting between the shafts, he slipped the leather brace over his shoulders, and, with the help of his singing companions, pulled the overloaded and swaying cart towards the gateway—and lurched out into the bright March morning.

Horace made southward, the cart rattling after, down the steep streets of Montmartre towards the merry roar of the city's holiday-making. As the singing, shouting young fellows, hauling and pushing the swaying cart, rattled past the *Moulin Rouge* into the Place Blanche, they ran full tilt into the genial idle crowd that was out to make the mid-Lenten fête of the Micarême. From all the windows of the great boulevard thousands of gaily-coloured paper streamers were floating downwards. The broad damp roadway and the footpaths were strewn with many-tinted paper confetti that lay like a carpet, muffling the feet of the people as they moved chatting and laughing along the wide thoroughfare. What little wheeled traffic there was went at a foot's pace.

The riot of students, with Gaston Latour blaring upon the horn, plunged into the procession.

The police made a rush towards the disturbance, but only to shrug shoulders when they reached the lumbered swaying cart:

"It is only the students!" said they, and fell a-laughing.

When they turned into the Place St. Michel they came plung-

ing into the noisy crowd of holiday-makers again, and their march up the students' beloved thoroughfare was a deafening and triumphant din.

"Orass" was evidently well known, and was greeted with the honours of a king of Bedlam.

It was in a pause that he took, coming to a halt between the shafts, to recover breath and give his other ear a turn of Gaston Latour's hunting-horn, that Horace espied Noll and Betty standing in the throng. He called to them to come and join him.

So it came about that, with a laugh, and shyly enough, they joined the noisiest crew in all Paris that mad March morning.

Swinging round, when they got moving again, into a by-way, they soon came to a halt in an old courtyard not a hundred paces from Noll and Betty's own home amongst the stars.

Horace touched Noll on the arm:

"Take her up to the top rooms," said he, nodding towards Betty—"they are mine. I'll be there in a minute."

Betty with Noll climbed up the polished, creaking old stairway.

In the courtyard the students got to their unloading, and were soon carrying the things upstairs.

Horace hoisted a couple of chairs under his arms, and joined the stream.

Betty and Noll landed in a spacious room at last, an airy large studio that has been the early dwelling-place of more than one man of genius; and Horace, arriving close on their heels, set down the chairs and bade Betty welcome to his home. They were all to lunch together as his guests as soon as the students had set out the place.

The great empty room was very soon an inviting-looking habitation. From a back room Jonkin was bringing in chairs and lounges that had never known the handcart. And the young fellows were cheerily laying rugs, nailing up mirrors, and fixing the stove, singing and skylarking—the walls were soon a pleasure to look upon, with a few posters of Steinlen's and the Beggarstaffs, and sketches, and gay odds and ends. The young fellows worked away with a will.

The room was nearly wholly furnished, and the youngsters were beginning to sit about, chatting and smoking, on the floor as often as not, when the door of the little room off the studio was flung open and the girl Babette appeared, wearing with dainty grace the delicate fineries of fashion that a Frenchwoman knows so well how to put on.

There was a sudden silence.

The girl halted midway down the room, her eyes fixed on Betty where she sat on a divan under the high studio window.

"Mother of God!" said the girl hoarsely—"what a beautiful woman!"

The students yelled with delight.

The girl Babette frowned impatiently, and going close to Horace, she whispered to him, caressingly.

Horace laughed, and led her by the hand to Betty:

" Babette wants to know if she may kiss you," he said. " She says you are very beautiful——"

Betty laughed prettily, rose from her seat and kissed her. And, sitting down again, she drew the other down beside her on the divan.

Gaston Latour, at a dig of the elbow and mutter from the young American, started to blare upon the French horn—for there were tears in the eyes of the laughter-loving frail Babette.

The conversation turned to other things.

Horace announced that they were all now his guests, and were forthwith to have breakfast sent in from the restaurant near at hand; as he spoke he noticed that the girl Babette had taken Betty's left hand in hers and was turning her wedding-ring round on her slender white finger.

Horace introduced the others to Betty and Noll:

Gaston Latour, who was essaying to bring dignity to the traditions of painting. Jack Pettigrew, the tall Yankee, whom also they afterwards came to know together with four other American students as one of the Five Foolish Virgins—the English students explained, because they were always late; but the French ones soon put the jest to roost in their open bewilderment at their dogged belief in the monogamies. Paul Kendrick of Boston, Massachusetts—which was the fault of Boston, and Paul wholly without blame in the matter. Kendrick bowed. Harcourt Phelps, another of the Five Foolish Virgins. Dick Davenant, known as the Disturber of Funerals, being one who always laughed in the wrong place. Dandy Donovan, the remaining Foolish Virgin. " Gobemouche " de Morneville, who was shirking the law, and catching flies when he should have been catching the subtleties of philosophy and the reasons for things. He put his heels together and solemnly bowed his close-cropped head. And half a dozen other young Frenchmen who talked the most ridiculous Ollendorffian English with serious unwinking eyes masking their fooling. . . .

Jonkin and the waiters, arriving with dishes and plates, burst into the room, ushered in by Gaston Latour, gloomily blaring fantastic joy upon the French horn, and all further conversation was impossible until the cloth was laid. . . .

CHAPTER L

Wherein the Spring comes a-frolic into the Court

Betty's young blood danced to the blithe promise of Spring that was in the March winds ; and her heart leaped to the quickening whisper of the awakening world.

The winter was over. Her sweet body sang to her of the gladness of the world. Her light step spoke of the gaiety of young womanhood ; and her laughing eyes knew no fear of destiny—her quick ears caught no echo, no whisper of the crack of doom, and had she heard it she would still have gone with the calm effrontery of youth to meet it. She skipped down the highway of life, all dainty and delighted and unafraid. The orchestral universe made music for her feet. She was alive. All nature smiled upon her, even through tears.

The rain that pelted with sharp icy particles or chill admixture of snow upon the window-panes, and the gusts that thundered against the shutters and plucked at their bolts, played but the castanets for her dancing blood, sounded but the drums for her ready feet ; she took her walks abroad in frank ecstasy of health, and lifting her dear face to the buffeting winds she breathed into her glowing body the emotional air that rocked the tall trees against the swinging firmament, pulsing the sluggish life-sap to their uttermost whistling twigs.

She was become a part of the motherhood of the world.

The protecting care that she had aforetime spent upon her disreputable old father, she now wound about this youth. Her mother-heart was no longer starved ; forgot the suffering of rebuff ; flinched no longer, scared by dread of Shame. 'Tis true, at a sudden noise she would start fearfully still, and her heart flutter sickeningly ; yet, for the love of a youth, she would have plucked the beard of sulphur-stinking devil, though the splendid insolence had scorched her sweet fingers to the bone.

Her honeymoon was fragrant with the breath of Spring.

With Noll she haunted the picture-galleries of the Luxembourg and roamed the polished oaken floors that are the slippery footway of the Louvre—stood with him before the Venus of Milo, where, on gazing awhile, the wondrous marble seems to breathe and move in all the majesty of human life—wandered before the

canvases whereon the masters have wrought colour that makes music to the eyes—and loitered spell-bound a-top the broad flight of steps where, poised on the prow of an ancient battleship, the winged Nike of Samothrace stands like aerial goddess alighting from flight.

Together they trudged the smiling streets of Paris that are the drawing-room of the world—loitered at her shop-windows—clambered up the steeps of Montmartre to the terrace, ill-kempt and weedy, where arose the gaunt and vasty scaffolding of the great church that the pious of France were building to the Sacred Heart in that strange mystic agony that would hope, by taking thought upon it and building in stone, to blot out the sins of the people—wandered about the banks of Seine, poring over the booksellers' boxes that line the walls of the quays with evergreen hope of finding some good book or print—lingered in the high vaulted aisles of the cathedral of Notre Dame, listening to medieval litanies—loitered about the historic purlieus of the Rue St. Honoré and the Rue de Rivoli, and sought cheap dinners in the courts of the old dilapidated Palais Royal, all haunted with the ghosts of the Revolution and rustling, to quick ears, with the silk and satin of the seventeen hundreds. Careless of the elements, they sallied out to hang about the book-shops and rummage in the print-sellers' trays, coming home with rare booty bought for a franc or so, to hang upon their walls—little masterpieces by Steinlen and others who are keeping alive the flame of art in France whilst the State is decorating the mediocrities ; and so, roaming homewards with their prizes, they would make for their quarters in the lilac twilight to dine in some cheap place where students dine—or not to dine—clambering up their six flights of stairs at the end of all with jest and laughter and muddied boots, singing a snatch of song amidst their pleasant weariness, just from sheer gladness to be alive.

Loneliness was wholly gone from the girl ; she had with her always now, by her side, one to whom she could chatter, one who could share her silences.

Her letters to Netherby and Julia at this time were love-lyrics.

From her balcony, Betty saw the spring peep shyly into the court below.

The silent snow that had fallen yesterweek, swirling softly, stealthily covering the earth, lying muffling white in deeper and deeper carpet to the foot that trod the courtyard, showing twigs and branches, otherwise scarce suspected, in white array, bowing down the leaves of evergreens—all in a night in solid whiteness fell to the ground, sliding from tree and parapet and ivied wall, and sank into the earth below, vanished beneath the gravel, leaving the damp cobbles shining darkly wet. In the night the rain had swept the snow from the face of the world—the morning laughed with sunlight—vasty white clouds swung across the blue firmament. The fat little concierge sallied out upon the high heap of gravel that had lain all winter in a corner of the courtyard,

and with a long shovel in her sinewy arms she flung abroad the pebbles, spreading them wide over the whole space. Swish ! she sent them flying against the box-hedge that was the ragged border of the flower-bed along the walls—and swish ! they went spirting to the furthest corners.

This devilish spreading of gravel satisfies the æsthetic sense of concierges ; and a run of the rake keeps it easily tidy. It is like the speech of concierges—gritty and utilitarian.

It was more. It was a grim recognition that Spring had tripped in from the country and glanced into the court ; it gave the official sanction. And lo ! in the beds, almost in a day, bare bushes were straightway sprinkled with emeralds, the desolate laurels and evergreens roused from their drooping and showed a lighter greenness above their sombre steadfast habit ; the tall lilacs ventured upon timid unfoldings. A hazel dangled catkins. The ivy on the walls, washed clean, glowed darkly green, hiding in grotesquely bulky nests the consequences of the loves of multitudinous sparrows. The sparrow no longer sat, one of many, a brown huddle on bare branches, a confessed beggar and one of a gang of greedy loafers, shamelessly indigent, but was become almost a rare sight, shooting like clay pellet from a sling across the void of the court and flinging into the green, his egoism lost in family cares, his life no longer the killing of dull time nor recklessly planned for the debauching of the years.

On the bare branches of the trees the impatient buds were swelling to the bursting. Along the brown earth showed themselves diffidently the rare wind-flowers. In the warmer corners, amongst much green of leaves, peeped the occasional violet. The briar came into leaf. The branches of most trees and bushes were bare, but in the corner an almond burst into blossom, blushing to greet the rude kisses and boisterous onset of the spring.

Then the concierge's tortoiseshell cat, patched yellow and black and white, alone suspicious of the elements, walking a-tiptoe in dandified discomfort across the puddled court, flirting the loathed sense of dampness from disgusted paw, blinking unemotionally even at the sparrows, would show sudden uneasiness, turned and cantered home again to the black hollow of the concierge's doorway—went gliding in—disappeared. A black cloud swung up across the blue, rolled out beyond the chimney-pots and blotted out the sun ; the wind, sneering amongst the evergreens, lost its temper, leaped forward with a roar and a yell and smote the ruffled ivy upon the walls—bombasting round the empty court, bursting in at the windows, sending loose shutters a-clattering, and viciously slamming doors. Rain came spitting upon the city—hissed the hail.

Thus sadly and somewhat sullenly the twilight would fall. But Spring, though hesitant, left a footprint even in the stony garden of the concierge.

April came smiling.

The buddings of March gave place to the green leaf. May had not yet put her pied bravery on.

The concierge would stand on the gravel and hold out a hand to the sunshine, feeling it between her fingers.

Nay, there had been even lack of rain for a couple of days or more. The pump in the court would tell with clanking report that the sinewy arms of the stout little concierge were at work on the iron handle, usurping the habit of the clouds and foster-mothering the narrow garden. Waddling, bucket-laden, to the thirsty earth, she would lean and fling sheets of water in the face of all green things—insolently, lest nature might deem her servile—and, the roots holding firm each hardy plant that had withstood the harsh winter's enmities as it reeled from the courtesies of her rude ministry, the concierge was moved to ambitions of gardening, digged holes in the stony beds, brought out potted plants and set them out in rigid rows into the quickening earth—pansy and lily and anemone and daffodil—with, drill-sergeant to their marshalled ranks, an occasional oleander bush.

The lilac came into bloom. The naked ash still showed black buds, but all else was sprinkled with leaves. The horse-chestnut, coquetting with the romping winds, unfolded little fans of green. And now, in the blue heavens above, white clouds were lightly roaming. The sun had warmth in his breath, and across the seething face of the awakening world flung restless shadows. On a high chimney a couple of pigeons sat cooing.

There was the blithe song of birds.

The concierge's tortoiseshell cat would come out and sit in a comfortable huddle of drowsiness upon the sun-warmed ground. Indeed, there had been strange, devilish, and Wagnerian music of late at night, and her modest eyes and demure person knew full well whose tortoiseshell lungs had been the source and set the key. Her nod could incriminate the black tom that sang the throaty ill-timed contralto to her shrill love-music—indeed, he sang under the whip. Even so might a concierge tell her love.

And there were voices within open windows—and heads thrust out, pretty heads amongst them—and lively chatter would pass across the court, and jests were flung from story to story, and genial sarcasms would reach the concierge, who flung back time-honoured repartee and time-worn ironies. There was laughter and the singing of a snatch of song—a piano would run up the gamut of a scale. From afar the tuneful hum of the murmurous city sounded deeper, and there was increase in the passing clatter of the nearer traffic. The air was astir with the sayings of many mouths, the thrill of dancing thoughts.

Through the open window the setting sun, streaming into her room, would find Betty at work, till Noll should come for her from the studio to take her out. He had tacked prints upon the walls above her desk, and there were books scattered about, and a pleasant picturesqueness held the place.

From the early morning, when she arose blithely, put out her rosy-tipped white feet upon the floor, and got to the warming of

the coffee at the cheerful stove and set the place astir with happy industry, making up the wonderful sommier, the bed of the students' quarter, into a lounge for the day, and the like offices, until the twilight, when Noll came home, and they went out to dine at some cheap place with other students, Horace and the Five Foolish Virgins and the rest, Babette sitting next to her—all was one long delight of living. The mid-day meal at the restaurants had soon had to go ; but she was well content enough, for she could make her own coffee, and he is a glutton indeed who is not content with the bread of Paris.

As the sun's amber light passed from the court and crept up the eastern wall, and the grey shadow of the dusk began to fall, full of chill other shadows, that took their stealthy stand in dark corners, and made a conspiracy of silence at the heels of the dying day, the air was filled with a mystic sense of evensong. For, when shutters were drawn to, by silent hands, and windows one by one were closed, and lamps gleamed yellow through the slats of close-shut jalousies, her lover's feet would be leaping up the stairs, and in the deepening blue of the heavens a myriad white stars be set aflame.

CHAPTER LI

Wherein it is hinted that it were Best to "Touch not the Catte botte a Glove"

THERE was in and around and about the lithe beauty of the dark slender young woman, Gabrielle Solignac, much of her own strange uncanny poetry, with its stealthy Eastern manner—catlike when she moved, glowing in colour as a ranging leopard, her clinging draperies loading the air with scent of sandalwood and the fragrance of Japan—catlike when at rest, and warm-hued and alertly languid as the Indies, her skin now showing saffron as dyed wood, now gleaming white as cunningly wrought ivory. She was mystic always as some half-revealed god in the great shadow of the deep hollows of pagan temples—silent and calm as Egyptian Sphinx.

Her exquisite fame had passed beyond Paris, and was broadcast over Europe; yet she was little more than girl. . . .

She had been married to Myre a month; and as she now lay on her side at full length along the great Eastern lounge, her dark head on her father's knees where he sat at the end of the lounge, there was something of leopard grace in her attitude; and in the long half-closed green eyes, something of leopard's latent fire.

Solignac, his great head bowed, chin sunk on chest, lay back on the lounge, his eyes staring out from the black shadows of their deep hollows under the heavy brows; and he passed his shapely nervous hand over the girl's tawny hair.

"It only seems but yesterday," said he hoarsely, "that he praised my sonnets—and I brought him here." He laughed bitterly. "I brought him here. Think of it, my Gabrielle; had he not praised my verse I had never——"

"Hush, father!" said she.

"It seems but yesterday that you married him—and went out and left me alone——"

"Father," said she, "I am so glad to be back. It was horrible—to be a woman. I am so glad to be a child again."

The old man laughed:

"I have gained," he said—"and, by God, I am almost glad he is a villain."

She put up her arms, pulled down his great head, and kissed his cheek :

" I have done with him," she said.

" To think that I am amongst the greatest European authorities upon the mysteries of the East ! and all to be juggled out of my wits by the first vulgar sycophant who sings my praise ! . . . Ye pagan gods ! how little wisdom is in books !"

She reached up her slender hand and put her fingers upon his mouth :

" Hush !" said she—" let us back to our books and rejoice in our lack of wisdom. We were happier with our curios and the mysteries. . . . I am done with him."

And all about them the little fat Eastern idols sadly smiled and smiled. . . .

The poet never recovered from the blow. He felt that through his conceit alone his girl had been bought. He would harp upon it sadly. She laughed always her soft low laugh at all his self-blame, purring of her love for him. But Solignac was a disillusioned man—thought the world wagged chins at him—lost heart—stooped beneath the secret shame of the blow. The blunder about his girl's marriage killed him. . . .

As he lay still and cold upon his white bed, at midnight, the great candles flaming in their high brass candlesticks, idols of the East gazing sadly down upon him, the girl, who had flung herself beside the bed, her bowed head on his chill unanswering hand, of a sudden ceased her sobbing and stood up. She bit her finger tips upon the urging of some sudden mood, gazing stealthily about the room. She was alone.

She walked, with strange cat-like tread, to an exquisite lacquer cabinet ; opened the lock, and lifting the lid, took out a red Japanese fan.

She went to the dead man's bookshelves and took down Solignac's last volume of sonnets—the pages were uncut.

She sat down at the foot of the bed. How often she had so sat as a child ! he had had such pride in her !

The high flames of the great altar candles flooding her with their light, cast shadows down upon her where she crouched over the book.

She gripped the handle of the fan in her long supple fingers and plucked a bright blade from out the cunningly wrought scabbard—the fan had only been in the outward seeming, most wondrously carved.

The blade was a cruel one, and keen as pitilessness.

She cut the pages of the book with it—and as the paper hissed its surrender to the sharp blade's thrust she smiled. But in the smile was little mirth.

Across the river, in the students' quarter, brooding before a wood fire in the rooms of his hotel, sat Mr. Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre.

He was worried.

He had written a play, choke-full of the most obvious symbolism. It had failed. It was not even considered original—indeed, it had been condemned as being very poor Ibsen indeed.

Nor had he won money out of the venture.

He was sadly puzzled.

Not to be original! it were not to be Quogg Myre.

He searched the history of genius to find a precedent on which to act—to be original.

He arose on to his splay feet, and with his awkward slovenly gait paced the room, shivered at the discomfort of his thoughts, walked to the fireplace and stood brooding at his image in the mirror above it; his hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets. His untidy colourless hair fell over his paste-coloured forehead—it was more untidy than usual, more colourless. A hank of it stood out on the back of his poll like the crest of a cockatoo. He was sickly pale. His weak puffy red lip was limp and uneasy. His long quarrelsome chin alone held firm for bouts of decision. It was his chin that fought the slacknesses of his body.

How had Shakespeare and these clever fellows discovered their great art? Why should not *he* create a school? These fellows—Shakespeare, Dickens, Balzac, Carlyle, Meredith, Sterne, and the rest—they had been just real live men, needing their dinner, sleeping o' nights, fighting their way to fame year after year, rebuffed, sneered at, ordinary human flesh—without half his chances. What was the trick that they had discovered?

Ay; what the key to their wizardry?

These fellows, the big ones, had never fretted their souls with all these frets of style, of art for art's sake, of their rating by jabbering classifiers in the eternities. Whilst he—he had wasted the years on such tom-follies. Nay, in expressing themselves they had created style. They had had something deeper than style. What was it?

There was something deep down in the heart of things that made their work live. Some mystic sense——

By heavens, it was mysticism!

He would get up mysticism—read it up at the libraries. He would write mysticism into his work——

He shivered.

In the curio shop, a fool of a Jap had drawn a sharp dagger from its sheath that morning—he hated knives and edged tools.

God! how cold it was!

He suddenly remembered——

Solignac lay stretched on his death-bed. He had a mind to go and see him lying so. . . . This Solignac must have died enormously rich—his collections were world-famous.

He went and put on his hat and cloak; lurched to the door——

At the door he hesitated.

Have a care!

Look to thyself, master Myre! That leopard quietude, the cat-like lithe walk, may be the watchful prowl of one that sees

more than thou with all thy blatancy and bold staring of fish-like grey eyes—perhaps, too, fears less. Bluster thou canst outbluster —but the silences thou canst not understand. . . . Wherefore thou shalt not dare that silent woman beyond the goading point of thy vulgarity—if thou be wise. Have a care.

He shut the door—came back—took off his cloak and hat—flung them on a chair.

He would like to have flouted this cold woman in that death-chamber ; it had never been done, it would come well in his auto-biography ; but——

What had this woman heard—guessed—seen—in that first month ?

Damnation ! He had been so careful—so circumspect. He recalled the warm accents frozen to cold disdain almost before they had left her father's house. She baffled him—made him uneasy. He had scolded, supplicated, whimpered, blustered. . . . What chiefly remained in the fearful hollows of his conceit was the passionless voice in its last statement that if he stepped across her door again she would kill him.

On his soul, he had been glad to be rid of her.

She alarmed him. He had jested about her to his fellows—but——

He shivered uncomfortably.

Yes. This woman alarmed him. He felt that his throat might be slit as he slept. . . . He rather liked a wordy brawl with women—he had his moments in drawing-room cynicism. He could brow-beat them with the best. He had pen-courage too. With a pen and ink-pot he was absolutely without fear. But——

With this silent woman he never could shake off the feeling of discomfort. She baffled him. He feared her.

By God ! he had it. He would write a book upon all his gadding loves with women—she should figure there *as one of many*. She would free him in the divorce courts.

And the scandal would float him into public notice again.

CHAPTER LII

Wherein Yankee Doodle is bugled—with a Strong Foreign Accent

HEARING her name called, Betty roused ; and, crossing the room, went to the balcony. Looking down into the court she saw the Five Foolish Virgins standing there below with faces upraised. The big fellow, Dick Davenant, called up that his cousin Molly wanted Betty to go to her straight away—wanted her along—before her guests arrived—she was giving a "tea"—they would meet later—when they had gotten the cakes and looked up "the boys." All this bawled at the top of his jolly lungs' strength.

Betty called down that she would go.

The young fellows waved their hats and marched out of the courtyard, chattering.

Betty wrote upon a half-sheet of paper that she was off to Moll Davenant's, and pinned it on the wall where Noll must see it on entering the room ; and, quickly dressing for the street, she let herself out of her room.

Moll Davenant was sitting on the side of her bed, seized with a harsh attack of coughing—sitting there, clutching the bed-clothes with her long thin fingers. The perspiration came out in a heavy dew upon her white skin. The struggle for breath was terrible, pathetic.

When she took her handkerchief from her mouth it was stained with blood.

She passed long slender hands over her damp brow and with deft fingers made a weary effort to get order into the bedraggled disorder of her mouse-coloured hair.

She moaned miserably, and her eyes roamed heavily over the littered room before her—"I shall never get this place tidy," she said.

There was a sharp brisk knock.

The door opened and Betty stepped into the room :

"Gracious, Moll!" cried she, glancing at the litter of the untidy place, "we must be quick!"

She had shut the door behind her when she entered ; she now went back and locked it.

Moll Davenant rose from the bed with the sudden and feverish

energy of a consumptive, and ran to Betty—the shadow of death gone from her haggard face—the hunted look departed from her great glowing eyes—a flush of delight painting the pallid features. She flung her arms about Betty :

" Thank Heaven, you are come, Betty—I was at my wits' end."

Betty gently unlocked the girl's embrace :

" Come, Molly," said she, taking off her gloves and jacket—" there's no time to lose—they'll be here in an hour. Gracious ! what confusion !"

She laughed gaily.

Moll Davenant looked about her helplessly.

Betty kissed her :

" Come along, Molly—where are the fineries? We'll start with the sommier."

She tidied the bed coverings, and before the other, languidly sighing, had brought some faded silks and embroideries from a box, Betty had made smooth the wondrous bed of the Latin Quarter to its intention of many-coloured lounge by day. Betty's quick fingers were soon hiding all signs of bed under silk and satin. She arose, flushed from the tuckings-in, and the smoothings-out ; and, taking an edge of battered silk pillow-case in her teeth, she slipped a pillow into it, shook it into place, and buttoned it down.

As the pillow disappeared into its crumpled once-gorgeous covering, the last sign of bed-hood passed out of the bed, and the sommier took on the splendour of an Eastern ottoman.

Betty laughed ; sat down on the edge of the ottoman, and ran her eyes over the room.

Moll Davenant went to her, flung herself on the floor at her feet, and burst into tears.

Betty stroked her shoulder :

" Come, come, Molly," said she—" we must get on. Don't be stupid——"

The girl made a pitiful effort to stop her sobs.

Betty stood up ; raised the poor girl to her feet ; and led her to the stove :

" Come, Moll—we'll talk as soon as the room is in order. . . ."

Wherever Betty went, order resulted. The easel was swung into position and a sketch placed upon it—sketches were set out on a ledge that ran along the wall. Chairs were slewed into position. And soon there was but a little pile of stray impossible things in the middle of the room that had no ordered place therein. Betty completed the pile with a pair of dingy slippers.

" I think," said she—" it is time to bury the refuse." And the two of them, laughing, soon had the litter thrust under the bed. A silk hanging descended over it, and it was gone. Order was everywhere.

" I'll finish the coffee," said Betty—" you go and tidy yourself, Moll."

Betty made herself tidy, and, flushed with the exertion, sat down on the lounge :

" Heigho !" sighed she.

Moll Davenant came to her, and nestled on the rug at her knee.

"Now, Moll, what is it? But we had better unlock the door—all's clear."

She rose to go to the door.

Moll drew her down by the skirt:

"No, Betty—not yet."

Betty sat down and drew the dainty head into her lap:

"What is it, Molly?"

"Betty"—she hesitated, and added miserably—"I ought never to have come to Paris."

"Why?"

"Because—because there is no one to look after father—and—he never said a word to prevent me coming to Paris—he said he thought it would be just splendid for me—but—I know now how lonely he is—he's such a *man*—he never said a word to hinder me leaving him all alone—never said a word that hinted of the lonely home I left behind me—but—well, it was the night before I left, I was lonely and got out of bed and crept downstairs, and he was sitting at a table, a lighted candle beside him, and he was looking at a little pair of shoes—they were the first little shoes I ever wore——"

She fell a-sobbing:

"And now I know—I know—I know."

Betty laid her hand on the girl's shoulder:

"But, Moll—you are going home to America within the year!"

She shook her head sadly:

"I ought never to have come here—we are so poor—I have crippled their means—I have crippled father—I am crippling dear old Dick—and I am only a mediocrity after all. And now I am doomed."

"Hush, Moll! You mustn't say these things."

The girl was seized with a violent attack of coughing.

"Betty—I just wanted to be a genius—to be talked about. At heart I only wanted to be an artist in order to make a name. It was the name. Now—I have awaked to find—I am a woman. I—have—only a little while—a little, little life. I know it. Why fear it? Don't shake your head, Betty, dear heart—the doctors broke it to me this morning. . . . But—I would just like to have—played—with a child——"

Betty laughed softly:

"Oho! mistress Molly," said she—"so there's a man—at last!"

Betty turned up the girl's face between her hands:

"Who is it?" she asked.

"Eustace Lovegood."

Betty bent down and kissed her:

"You happy thing!" she said. "And how on earth did you come across Eustace Lovegood?"

"We were a whole month in London before we came on here—Eustace and my cousin Dick took to each other—and—so—everything came about. . . . We knew nobody and were lonely

—but Eustace made the sun shine—he helped us to Paris—he said we could live so much cheaper here——"

"But, Moll—what became of Eustace—and—the sunshine ?"

"He's in Paris. Has been in Paris for nearly a week."

"Oho ! and you've been keeping the sunshine all to yourself, Moll ! Tut tut !"

Moll burst into tears.

Betty stroked her cheek :

"No, no, Moll ; this will never do. Where's the sunshine ?"

"He's gone," she sobbed.

"Gone ?"

Moll nodded through her tears :

"One of the girls at the studio said he was making me ridiculous. And—I told Eustace. And—yesterday morning he wrote to tell me the girl was right—and—and——"

She was seized with a violent fit of coughing.

Betty's brows were knit :

"What did you do, Moll ?"

"Nothing."

Betty drew the dainty head within her lap :

"Thou fool !" she said in French—it seemed less harsh, whilst just as true ; and, after a while, she added in English :

"Thou poor mad fool, Moll !"

Moll was sobbing miserably.

Betty sat and soothed her, running her healing hand over the sobbing girl's hair, and thinking :

"Fancy !" she said at last—"fancy ! Eustace Lovegood !" And she looked down at the fragile figure at her knees. She saw that the slender frame was grown more sadly slender—the thin hands more sadly transparent—the fire of the strange and awful disease was eating her blood. The girl was torn with the feverish energy of the devil of consumption, that whispered urgingly at her elbow to live her moment at the topmost pitch of energy or she would be too late.

Betty was roused from her brooding by the shuffle of footsteps that ascended the stairs outside—and the sound of light-hearted laughter.

"Moll, quick ! here they come !"

She bent down and kissed the girl :

"Let me think it out," she said—"we must do something. I'll do it. I know Eustace Lovegood well. . . . Now you are hostess—stand up—and take command of yourself. . . . That's right." She sprang to the door, unlocked it, and skipped back to the other.

There was a loud knock.

The Five Foolish Virgins trooped in, headed by Gaston Latour, playing on the French horn what was soon discovered to be "Yankee Doodle"—with a strong French accent.

CHAPTER LIII

Wherein we skip down the Highway of Youth

SATURDAY night.

The Boule Miche was ablaze with light of frequent cafés; its roadway vexed with roar of wheeled traffic; its pavements astir with shuffle of many feet.

From the Place Saint Michel, where the black waters of the stealthy river washed her quays in darkling passage to the far sea, the broad thoroughfare of the Boule Miche, the students' highway, flaring in the black reek, swept upwards to the shadowy gardens of the Luxembourg, topped the hill, and was lost amongst the stars. Riverwards, where the Ile de la Cité, with sombre hint of law-courts and hospital, arose from out the flood in the pitchy murk of the night, loomed the dark cathedral towers of Notre Dame, gloomy with threat of eternal punishment to transgressors —and low down and afar gleamed the weeping lights of the Morgue, where sleep, after their last violence, the disowned and discarded dead.

But neither above on the limitless blue, where are the stars, nor below on the unthinking litanies of an outworn creed, nor upon the rude death that ends alike the abstemious nun and the dizzy jig of Folly and Crime, were bent the thoughts of the multitudinous students who ranged the highway, making holiday—indeed, their eager eyes were wholly set upon living the conventional unconventionalities of youth, skipping down the highway of life with shout and laughter and song and merry riot, arm in arm, in rollicking mood, reckless of the flitting years, careless of the eternities.

It was midnight, and the Bal Bullier being at an end, its frantic dancings done, and its doors closed, the youths were pouring into the Boule Miche with much rustle of prettily dressed young women who hung upon their arms—and were hovering about the lighted spaces where the cafés blazed into the street.

The sombre academies enwrapped in the darkness of the alleys at either hand, and the professors who snored in their staid beds —what mattered they? Away with pompous thinking, when the blood's jigging. And if they were awake even the most learned of the old gentlemen, with fullest sprinkling of dandruff on collar,

shall he explain the thrill that is in the kiss of a woman's lips, or add a tittle to the glory of it in the explaining, for all his learned researches ? It is there, for the getting, and it holds none the more magnificence for the dissecting of it. Youth is theirs but for a fleeting too little while—and the blood is a-jumping—and there is life—and the love of woman—and the laughter of wine—and the joy of song—and pleasant comradeship. Revelry if you will ; but the dear earth is for the enjoying. Tush ! youth is not for the denying. And there is no time for arguments, or the gladness of life is flown almost before the rubbing of bewildered eyes

God ! what it is to breathe ! to love God's design by living it.

What hath philosophy done but make the world yawn, thou numbskull dreamer of dreams that shouldst be living dreams ?

This is life. The miracle is given to you. What is changing water into wine to this ? Take it in both hands. Grasp it. Live it. All the thinking of all the academies cannot give you this. Grown old in mere thinking upon life, you shall not call back the blithe days of your youth. Dig your hands deep into the grave of your dead self, and you shall not find the splendid years of the joy of life. Get you up to the uttermost mountains' tops, dive you to the bottom of the uttermost deeps, you shall not find it. It was yours. Whilst you brooded hesitant how to spend it, it hath slipped your fingers, passed like a sunlit merriment, and become part of a sigh in the eternal mystery. The lordship over vasty continents shall not yield you the glory of it—neither ambition nor riches nor learning nor immortality shall yield you a shred of that which, wholly unasked for, was yours.

God ! how lavish, how wasteful, thou !

Why hug the skeleton of life ? Fool ! peer thou hard enough : yonder, at the end of all, in the shadows, stands the Reaper—down the roadway grimly smile the sombre mutes standing impatiently by a plumed hearse, expectant of fees. Alike for saint and sinner and gay and sober they smirk. They take your measure. 'Tis waste of time to protest with them. The rascals have the last word.

Tush ! Go hang to them !

So they sing in the tavern on youth's highway—and toss off the toast—and are merry.

Inside the Café Harcourt, at a table, in an angle somewhat apart from the scintillating din, sat Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre and the exquisite Aubrey. The Honourable Rupert Greppel also was there, hidalgic, aloof, aristocratic ; and Lord Monty Askew, leaning his chin on the jade handle of his cane, and gloved with sleeved gloves, like a woman's—he, too, being aristocrat, could not live without the attention of the crowd whom he despised in speech and verse. And as Rupert Greppel uttered his splendid contempt of humanity, Askew would nod, giving Greppel the polite attention of his eyes—his thoughts the while on his own pose and poesies. Aubrey too was gazing at himself in a mirror.

Greppel was airing his hidalgeries, regretting that all hope of the hunting of peasants with dogs was lost in these vulgar days of democracy.

Quogge Myre was about to yawn openly, when his roving gaze fell upon the handsome face of Bartholomew Doome at a table near by, where, on either side of him, there sat two of the most pronounced beauties of the Latin Quarter. Myre caught the eyes of Horace Malahide, who with Babette at his side also sat at Doome's table; and he nodded and smiled through his colourless untidy moustache at the young fellow.

The two beautiful young women were turned to Doome, gazing upon his handsome face with hungry eyes of admiration. Gaston Latour, sitting opposite, was leaning forward, stroking the gloved hand of one of them where it lay upon the table, Doome listening to him with an amused smile.

"Ah, Liane," said Latour, "the English are good fellows, but they cannot love. . . . Conjugate their verb: I lof, thou loffest, he lofs, ve lof, you lof, zey lof—it is like coughing into a passionate woman's ecstatic ear—it is born of their fog—as well kiss a haddock!"

The two young women smiled away the sally pityingly, keeping their rapt eyes on the Byronic Doome.

Gaston grinned:

"Mon Dieu!" said he, "he has not even an Englishman's excuse for existence—he is not even rich."

The two women had arisen, scowling at each other's handsome faces, their beautiful lips set angrily, and began to quarrel about the seated Doome, who thrusts his hands into his pockets resignedly, and sat grimly silent through it all.

Words were like to come to blows between the two women, for the hot-blooded Liane, to reach the other, moved out to battle—the other retired slowly up the café, her reckless rallies as she withdrew bringing all eyes to the disturbance.

Women stood up on chairs and tables, to see the details; and the students thundered applause, and threw in comic suggestions.

"The last word is with Liane," shouted a great burly fellow with a big laughing voice, an artist; and added: "Tiens! what a Juno, hein!"

Liane turned her pretty back upon them, and the wit ran down.

She came back to her seat beside Doome; sat down; and laid a hand upon his sleeve:

"It was thy fault," she said.

Doome looked at her grimly:

"Now call me a fool, Liane," said he grimly.

The tears came to her eyes.

Gaston Latour went and sat down beside her, touched her hand:

"Hist!" said he—"Liane, you must not contradict him. It is the privilege of genius to utter the truth."

She turned to him, the tears in her eyes giving way to sad laughter. Latour, with mock absent-mindedness, kissed her:

" Oh, pardon—I forgot," said he ; and so led back the laughter.

Doome smiled :

" You must forgive Gaston, Liane," he said. " He forgets everything—he even forgets himself."

The girl leaned on Doome's shoulder, turned to Latour :

" He says I am to forgive you, Gaston," said she. " I love him."

She took Doome's hand in her lap, and stroked his fingers between her gloved hands.

" I love the English," she said.

Gaston looked shocked :

" Oh no—not so many as that !" said he, " it isn't proper. . . ."

As Betty, led by a waiter, and followed by Moll Davenant and Noll and the Five Foolish Virgins, peering at the light, entered the flare of the café, looking for places, unable to find seats under the awning outside, she heard her name called, and, looking round upon the merry crowd, she saw Babette signing to her to go to their table.

But Noll had been recognised, and there were loud shouts for him about the café, and hands held out. His genial ways, his frank habits, his kindly tact, had early won the hearts of the rollicking student crew, and he had soon passed from " Monsieur " to surname, from surname to Christian name, translated to heathen barbarianisms, to Noll, mon vieux, old man. . . . Dick Davenant and the other Foolish Virgins came in for a like ovation from " the boys." And it was with some difficulty that they managed to struggle through the genial riot after Betty and join those that sat at Doome's table. Quogge Myre and Aubrey took advantage of the chance to join the party.

Babette held Betty's hand now, and prattled happily. She pointed out to Betty's keen eyes the many beauties present, told their histories with light touch, without malice and without exaggeration—just the simple picturesque sketch. And always the end was the same. Suzanne yonder, with the glorious hair like copper, she was the companion of that artist—he would arrive—oh, yes, the world would hear of him. Suzanne had been a model at the studios—but the hours were long—it was very fatiguing—the walls of the studio were grey and bare—she hated dull gowns—she went to the Bal Bullier—the next morning the studio was very grey—she was cross and sleepy—the students were surly—it's so stupid to stand and be drawn—stupid and tedious and tiresome—she would go no more—at the cafés one can do as one likes—the cafés were gay—she had found a bourgeois—he was dull, but she had silk dresses instead of gowns of stuff—still, he *was* a bore—so she left him and came back to the cafés—the students were always gay—the café always bright——

Ah, yes, that was Mimi—she had been a dressmaker—she too had gone to the Bal Bullier—and had become the companion of a law student—it was hard to keep the pot boiling, but she had been happy—then his five years of *quartier latin* were up, and he had

gone home again and married and become bourgeois and respectable—so she came to the café, where the students are always gay and the lights are always bright, and she liked to wear silks and fine linen.

Betty touched her arm :

" And after that ?" she asked.

Babette shrugged her shoulders :

" Perhaps she will marry a tradesman," she said. " Perhaps——" She gave it up.

" And after that ?"

Babette kissed Betty's serious face :

" Thou odd inquirer," said she. " If you ask after that and after that, why we grow old one day—and after that die—and after that are buried—and after that, who cares ?"

She laughed, and stroked Betty's hand :

" Ah, and that is Marcelle—she was apprentice to a sempstress—but the work was hard, the hours long, oh so long, and the food scarce and poor—and she has only once to live—and she has Titian red hair—she, too, came to the cafés, where the students are always gay and the lights are——"

There was a shout of laughter from the students.

Out of the riot the quavering voice of age rose in broken falsetto, singing a snatch of song that was on the town in Betty's childhood, a soprano passage from an old Italian opera.

An old woman, with blear watery eyes, her tattered and rusty old dress hanging in an untidy bunch about her shrunken body, a few grey hairs straggling over her withered leaden face, was singing in the full operatic manner. A strange pathetic sight. So an old harpsichord sounds, awaking startled ghosts in some old-world room at the rude touch of living hands.

The end of the broken song was received with loud laughter from the students, who shrieked and coughed until the tears stood in their eyes—they flung pence at the old woman's feet. Women were standing on tables, students were crowded in a ring about her.

" Thou hast danced with Victor Hugo, Margot, my pearl—show us how !" cried a bearded cub from the schools.

She bowed—gathered up her seedy tattered skirts with something of the old-world grand manner that went with the stately crinoline, and, showing down-at-heel boots of the elastic-sided variety that are called " jemimas," her feet got shuffling to the steps of an old dance of the quarter. In the sunken hollows of the wan old face hovered the ghost of the set smile that dancers smile, baring toothless gums—the lights flickered but feebly in her lamp of life—she skipped the steps now right, now left, now back, now forward, with the stiff travesty of old age—and set the tables in a roar. A grotesque attempt at high-kicking brought down thunders of applause. The sous showered upon the floor.

She picked up the scattered money with pathetic weary old hands ; bowed to the applause, and taking her way stiffly through the café, passed out into the night.

And to Betty it was as though the shadow of death had passed amongst the revellers. Ay, even youth must come to that—the mockery and ghost of its dead self.

"Ah, that is old Margot." Babette touched Betty's hand. "She comes out so at night—it was here she had her triumphs fifty years ago."

"And—the end ?"

Babette shrugged :

"She is rich," she said—"she comes out so at night—but in the day she is rich. She has a villa in the country. Oh, but yes . . . Gaston Latour has seen it. Last year. Ah, she was so droll—she had sung a love-song in the tenderest manner. Gaston gave her a gold piece by mistake for silver. She was here the next night—Gaston also. He told her. "Bien !" said old Margot, and gave him her card. . . . He went by rail—the villa was on a lake—charming. He knocked. A servant opened the door. He was shown into a salon. Madame would come in a moment. Madame Margot came. Ah, yes, said she, the twenty-franc piece ! She opened a cabinet and gave it to him. Gaston, dumfounded, thanked her, was retiring towards the door thanking her, apologizing. She put her hand on his sleeve : 'But, monsieur has forgotten the franc !' "

Betty smiled :

"Who is she ?" asked she.

"The old woman once lived with a student who came to great fame, and——"

She shrugged her shoulders. She turned suddenly and gazed hard at Betty :

"There are tears in your eyes," she said. "What are you thinking of, my dear ?"

Betty sighed, and said hoarsely :

"The waste of women—the waste of women."

That evening, Aubrey cast his evil eyes upon Moll Davenant.

He sat beside her, showered upon her the subtle flattery of his whole attention, was soon in touch with her thwarted ambitions, was sharing her dreams—and before the evening was out he had set a hedge of confidences round about her that isolated her, with him as sole companion, from the rest of her fellows. With all the moods of her frail talents he was swiftly intimate ; and, as he sat leaning forward, his cheek on his hand, gazing intently at her, where she lolled back at his side, his eyes took in every turn and line of the strange pallid beauty of her hungry features. He put off his outward conceit and interested her in herself—as he himself was interested——

There was a loud shout.

A number of the students and their young women rose, and each dragging a chair behind him along the floor, they formed into line, and marched round the café, singing a student song.

Thrice round the café, and flinging down the chairs, they streamed out into the street. . . .

At the door Betty kissed Babette good-night ; and it was at this moment, as their party stood about, that Betty, taking Moll Davenant's arm, was accosted by Quogge Myre, who at once assumed the tone towards her that he considered so fascinating to women—a tone of chivalrous condescension. Betty fretted under the attention of his repulsive eyes. She did not like the man—his intent regard could not escape her. He was asking if he might call upon her ; and she was answering that she was denying herself all social calls until she had finished a work on which she was engaged, when he put out his hand familiarly and with his fingers flipped the ends of the ruffle that she wore :

" You look nice and fresh," he said.

Betty turned her back upon him. He always affected her like filth ; when he spoke it was as if filth could speak.

She slipped her hand through Molly's arm.

Horace Malahide, who had watched the incident, laughed :

" Come, Babette !" said he—" we'll see Noll and Betty and Moll home."

Betty drew Moll Davenant away as Aubrey put his heels together and gave his bow like a dancing-master.

" Come, Moll," said she, and squeezing the girl's arm, she added in a laughing whisper—" and I'll find Eustace to-morrow."

To her surprise there was no answering smile.

As Aubrey and Myre turned out into the night together, Aubrey looked at the other out of the corner of his eyes :

" That's a very beautiful woman who—snubbed you—Myre," said he.

Myre shrugged his shoulders :

" A woman should require winning," he said. He licked his puffy underlip sullenly.

They walked awhile in silence.

" They say that she's Baddlesmere's wife," Aubrey said—" and a prude."

Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre laughed :

" Oh, they all like their squeeze," said he.

They walked some way down the street.

Aubrey sighed ; and after awhile he said absently :

" I have never loved a consumptive woman yet. And I have found one—it will be a strange emotional experience."

" Oh, she's consumptive, the faded lily, is she ?" growled Myre.

Aubrey smiled :

" She is beautiful," he said—" and she has a hectic mind."

LIV

Wherein the Widow Snacheur separates the Milk from Human Kindness

In a large and shabby room on the ground floor of the court, a dark blur in the gloom of the gathering dusk, crouched rather than sat the widow Snacheur—*La bête noire*, the street urchins had it in awed whisper, thrusting out mocking chins behind her back.

With hard old fingers she was smoothing out upon the bare table the crumpled sheet of newspaper which she had just unfolded from a package sent by a tradesman ; the hawklike eyes strained to read the print, but the fading daylight smudged the page.

She drew her soiled black shawl more closely about her bent shoulders :

She lifted up a reedy voice :

"Madelaine !" she cried harshly.

A door opened, and there stepped through the opened way a lean girl of fourteen, the drudge that is called maid-of-all-work.

"Yes, madame," said Madelaine, or what was the half-starved embodiment of Madelaine, her long bare arms thrust out through her turned-up sleeves, her dingy black dress a world too short for her and showing bare legs, her stockingless feet in down-at-heels boots that had already served another owner.

The child held herself insolently. Indeed, the old woman Snacheur had beaten her the night before, falling upon the slender shoulders with a stout stick ; and for the first time the girl had flown at the brutality and struck back—the old woman shuffling backwards into a corner of the room before the onslaught, retreating in sullen surprise, wiping a long tingling nose with the back of a sinewy hand as the pain sent the tears trickling down the runnels of her withered cheeks. Through scowling evil eyes she had realized that the harsh thrashings of these poor lean shoulders were at an end—that the four years of grim domination since she had taken this poor outcast child to be her drudge were gone—and that whatever cruelty of starvation and neglect her miserly wits might still impose upon her hungry years, the rod had fallen from her gloating fingers and the blue weals upon the poor thin shoulders were painted with the hellish brand of her

cruel hand for the last time. The child was springing up into starved youth—nay, girlhood was almost gone—indeed, within the gaunt body lurked some strange hint of womanhood, smiling forth even from the starved body of this hireling thing.

"Yes, madame," said Madelaine.

The brooding old woman came back out of the humiliating past:

"There are halfpence on the table," she said—"go and buy milk—and see that the thieving beast gives you full measure—there was no milk in the neck of the bottle last night—he is a scoundrel—unless you drank it on the way and are yourself the thief."

Madelaine shrugged her lean shoulders, and gathered up the halfpence. As she left the room the old woman called after her:

"And see that you are back before the darkness—there will be no light to show you to bed."

When the child had gone, the old woman arose and shuffled to a cupboard. She listened to the girl fumbling at the latch of the outer door—heard her depart—waited so until the brisk footsteps died away into the traffic of the street. Searching in her skirts for a bunch of keys, she glanced carefully round the darkening room, opened the cupboard door, and took out an old tin canister. She held the canister to the fading light of the high window, chose an end of candle from some others, and carefully locked up the tin in the cupboard again. She set the candle in a bottle and lit it.

Sitting down by the table again, she smoothed out the crumpled newspaper.

It was said that the widow Snacheur was rich. She owned at any rate the block in which she lived—from the ground floor she herself occupied up to the top floor where Moll Davenant rendered tribute to her.

As Betty crossed the twilit court and entered the deeper gloom of the house, she found Madelaine, a lean shadow in the dusk, fumbling with the latch on the outer door of the widow Snacheur's apartments.

"Is Mademoiselle the American at home, Madelaine?" she asked the girl.

Madelaine left the door, walked out into the courtyard and looked up.

"Madame, there is a candle burning on the sixth floor," she called across the court. She came to Betty: "And there is a shadow cast. Mademoiselle the American must be at home," she added; and got to fumbling with the latch of the door again.

"Can't you unlock it, Madelaine?" Betty asked the girl. "Shall I hold your bottle? Your hands will be free."

"Thank you, madame, no—you are very kind. The widow will not have the lock mended—so I have to tie it with string from the inside—when I go out."

Betty stood on one side to let a young workman go by. He was a pasty-faced slouching young fellow of powerful loose build; he had come down the stair with curious stealthy step; and he took off his hat clumsily as he passed.

Madelaine laughed as the awkward youth slouched out into the court:

"That dirty fool Hiéne wants to be my lover," she said—"he pesters me—but I am not going to love workmen—I am going to be driven in carriages."

"Hush, Madelaine—you must not say such things."

Madelaine gave her good-night, laughter in her eyes, and with the grace of coming womanhood took herself off airily towards the city's lights—a promise of lithe beauty in her walk for all her bedraggled rags.

Moll Davenant had heard Betty's light step upon the stair; she opened the door for her to enter as Betty reached the landing. When she had shut it, the two girls embraced each other.

"Come, Moll—and sit on the bed; and we'll gossip."

Moll suffered herself to be led to the sommier, and they sat down upon the snowy whiteness of it.

Moll was watching Betty's face hungrily.

"Moll," said Betty—"I have been to look for Eustace Lovegood—ah, such a mean shabby little hotel it was, poor fellow! but he was gone. The waiter said he went back to England yesterday—after waiting restlessly about the place for a letter that did not come. . . . I wish Eustace would spend a little money on himself instead of giving it to every pitiful person that cries out to him."

Moll was seized with a violent fit of coughing.

She slipped on to the floor, buried her face in Betty's lap, and sobbed miserably.

Betty stayed with her until far into the night—until the heart-rent girl slept peacefully upon the white bed.

She covered the poor sleeping soul with her meagre blankets. . . .

As she rose to leave, her glance fell on a new book which lay beside the lamp. It was a volume of erotic verse. She opened it and found an inscription on the fly-leaf from Aubrey.

Betty sighed—put the lamp low—and slipped on tip-toe from the room.

* * * * * *

In the dusk that held the city the next evening, Betty tapped at Moll's door; and she thought she heard a sob for answer. . . . She listened awhile; but all was still. She rattled at the door and called. Only silence.

Slowly she descended the stairs again.

At the bottom she came upon Madelaine, lean and cheery. There was some talk.

She was just about to leave the girl when a man entered from out the dusk of the court, passed them, and began to ascend the stair.

It was Aubrey.

She heard him climb flight after flight. He reached the top. Her eyes were on Madelaine's gossip, but her ears were listening for only one sound.

A door opened and slammed.

There was silence.

CHAPTER LV

Wherein is Some Worship of the Moon

It was the national fête of the Republic—the Fourteenth of July.

All day, Paris had been a-rattle with tap of hammers. At every street corner, baggy-trousered carpenters had been putting the last nails into the pulpits of the lightly made bandstands ; and now, as the flaring sun went down in golden glory over the edge of the city, bathing the decorated streets in amber light—the boarding of the bandstands being covered with the gay splendour of tricolour bunting, and gaudy coloured paper lanterns strung in gay festoons from lamp and tree and window—Paris felt herself arrayed in all her holiday attire as she took breath before her dancing.

At the end of the street where Noll and Betty had their lodging, the carpenters completed their task amidst wide-eyed wonder of inquisitive children and chatter of gossiping neighbours that stood at gaze along the pavement. The landlord of the little restaurant opposite called to the workmen to go and sit down at his tables and quench their thirst. The great slouching fellows needed no second bidding—indeed, they knew the liquor good, for the fat genial little host, Monsieur Charcot, had been plying them with tankards throughout the day, at every hint of heat or weariness, and the hints had not been few, urging them to push on, that he might get up his lanterns, and cover the stand with the red, white and blue stripes of France before darkness fell.

Beaming with hospitality, he now sallied across the road, two waiters at his side carrying paper lanterns and bundles of the nation's flags ; and the rickety bandstand was soon converted into as near a gorgeous opera-box as the limitations would allow.

Madame Charcot stood near, crying orders to the waiters, which nobody obeyed.

All the pretty *blanchisseuses*, bare-headed, were out along the curb, adding advice and merriment. The which brought out the shop-lads. There was kindly genial banter, and much talk and prophecy of dancing in the evening.

The old people stood about, smiling ; and were raising reminiscences from the dead.

In the evening, Gaston Latour and Horace and the rest whooped to Noll and Betty to come down from their high lodging ; and in

a jovial party they wandered through the glowing streets of the illuminated city. All Paris was dancing. Under the gaudy paper lanterns the citizens were strolling, dancing, capering, laughing, singing—happy as children. And when the students, returning from their long evening's promenading, came into the street where they lived, the bray and blare and shrill music of fiddle and trombone and cornet and flute, rending the rustling air with an old-time waltz-tune, told that the quarter was still dancing.

The youths and maids were dancing; the middle-aged were dancing; shop-folk and artisan; the old people were dancing.

Mine host, Monsieur Charcot, kicked a heel, blowing hard to keep the time with a young milliner to the pace of the ill-jigging waltz—the trombone being overfull of beer was inclined to sluggardy, whilst the fiddle had developed ambition under the heat of the wines of Italy to lead the music by more than an easy length. The trombone did well, doggedly thrashing the air with overwhelming beat of time, save when he hiccupped, when confusion would threaten. All the little sempstresses and washer-girls were stepping it, swinging round in the whirl with the grocer lads and the youths of the quarter, petticoats a-whirl. The pasty-faced and sullen young workman Hiéne, in his best clothes, was jumping through the measure with Madelaine, who had given old widow Snacheur the slip. And now the melancholy-visaged Gaston Latour seized the plump concierge about the height a waist had once been, and Madame Hodendouche, but mildly protesting, found herself flung off her feet and swept into the revolving whirl, well-pleased enough to be in the social eddy. . . .

All in the street danced out the night, the same tune serving more than thrice—indeed, the call for new airs had started an unseemly brawl between the fiddle and the trombone on the art of Wagner, which had only been washed out in Chartreuse. So they got to jigging it again to the old limping harmonies. They were not over-critical. They had all grown up together, had danced out the national fête together through the warm summer evening in the ruddy glow of the orange-paper lanterns to the like halting music since they could well remember. Thus they now footed it, until the white light of the coming day crept over the eastern roofs and snuffed out the orange glow of the candles that guttered in the lanterns' sockets, and sent them all to their beds. The early midsummer sun that came a-peeping into the town lit silent thoroughfares in a drowsy city.

The arisen sun ascending into the high firmament saw the students thronging to the railway-stations, with scanty baggage and uproarious souls, to spend the hot days in country places or by the sea—a cheery boisterous crew, good-tempered, chaffing, frankly jovial.

The exodus from the Latin Quarter begun, the "boys" burst in upon Noll and Betty—Babette and Horace and the Disturber of Funerals and the rest, and Gaston Latour. They all helped

to pack, and dragged them off to join the mighty holiday stream, going down to the outskirts of Paris, to Enghien-les-Bains and Montmorency, by train, Gaston Latour rending the air with devilish din of French horn, and insisting on dancing the Arab *danse-de-ventre* before railway officials and the police, his melancholy face seriously unsmiling as he stepped it, the others wailing the mournful Moorish music and beating time with tap of canes or beat of hands. . . . And all too fleetly the summer days went by in the pretty country places round about Paris.

Betty loved this summer time. Noll was with her all the day long, blithe of heart and in good spirits, sketching with her and a dozen others out of doors or writing by her side in their delightfully bare room in the primitive inn. The world was fragrant with the scent of flowers.

As the sunny daytime passed into the violet grey dusk, they would wander arm in arm along the pretty country roads—Babette and Horace, Noll and Betty, Gaston and the beautiful Liane, the Five Foolish Virgins and the rest—straying through the twilight carelessly, never wandering too far from civilization and the band and the casino's paper lanterns—never too far to reach the merry dinner of an evening, lolling in pleasant fatigue round the table in the trim little bosquets of the courtyards of inns, where they all loitered over dinner to talk wondrous nonsense about the delights of a country life, mixed with criticisms of art and of books and of the world. And, the dinner done, they would stroll round the lake, and sit upon the banks, and gaze entranced at the moonlit fairyland—the lights that danced upon the waters and the stars that bespangled the sapphire heavens with a myriad winking mysteries—glad to be alive where all was beautiful.

And there would be sweet idle talk of the day when they should all have villas on the lake with lawns by the water's edge, disdainful of the rough struggle of the world, watching the pigeons and the peacocks in the sun, listening to the coo of doves, and, when the day was done, content to sit at gaze with the wizard moon and myriad stars, fretting their souls with no stupid thought for fame or name—yet each one knowing in his heart that in most delicious idleness would be weariness beyond the weariness of toil.

There was one thorn only in all this summer delight—Moll Davenant, moody, a prey to odd whims, possessed now of strange reservations and sudden shrinkings, now frightened, now daring, now boisterous, now brooding, lived feverishly, crowding her life into its little span, her pathetic eyes on her doom, as one who knows how short a while she has to live. More than once, Betty had sold some trinket of her own to get the wherewithal to tempt the uncertain appetite ; and Noll, too, was the poorer by more than one little possession which he cheerily said he did not want. Then the girl would disappear for days, returning fagged and troubled, like one drugged. Her flushed colour showed that the flames of her life were burning out the tissues of her frail body, and a feverish desire to live the night as well as the day urged her to

frantic bursts of work and of excitement, alternating with long hours of lassitude and a pathetic patience and humility and listless idleness. One day she disappeared and was not heard of for a week; then the news came from far away that she had been seen at the casino at Dieppe with Aubrey.

* * * * * *

At the doors of the Hôtel Continental in Paris stood Ponsonby Wattles Ffolliott, talking to Quogge Myre; Rupert Greppel and Lord Monty Askew stood at either hand; they gazed superciliously at the passers-by.

Ponsonby Ffolliott, blowing cigarette smoke through his nostrils, said, drawling:

"It's an awful bore—but Lady Boone is throwing her girl at my head—an awfully pretty girl, she is, by Jove—but, you know, a fellow must have his fling first—or how is a fellow to know he loves the girl—and I am really quite too young——"

They slapped him on the back, and there was laughter.

Ponsonby Ffolliott felt the glory of a man of the world jumping in his marrow; he kicked out his legs:

"Yes," he said affectedly. "The old trout made me swear to go down to Enghien-les-Bains for lunch. Such a silly hole—such a silly meal—but, you know, a fellow isn't bound by a promise made under compulsion, is he?"

Ponsonby blew out smoke:

"By Jove," he said, staring at a girl, one of a bevy that passed, who glanced a roguish eye at him—"what a very pretty girl!"

Ponsonby kicked out his legs jauntily; and followed the girl. And, as he walked, the long white laces of his stays hung down behind and swung to his strutting.

CHAPTER LVI

Wherein it is suspected that there has been Peeping through Windows

August and September passed, and the fever went out of the hot breath of the sun ; October came into the city in cooler fashion and more russet habit. The scent of autumn in the air brought the students scrambling back from the country, and the Boule Miche knew their light gait and cheery voice once more.

With the return of his boon companions to their old haunts, Noll was out and away early and late again. The first day of October had seen him taken off by Horace Malahide, with a set of drawings to Gérôme—had seen him receive the letter which should admit him a *nouveau* to the great man's *atelier* in the State schools of the Beaux Arts. He had only to wait until the fifteenth to be initiated into the riotous mysteries of the French studio where Latour and Malahide were not the least boisterous of its boisterous pupils.

As Noll came back, triumphant from his interview with the celebrated painter, Horace and Latour singing him in, he flung down his drawings upon the floor. Betty, glowing with delight at his delight, took them up one by one, and was somewhat surprised at their technical accomplishment. She had feared his days with Horace Malahide had been but idle days. Yet, even with this evidence before her eyes, she was not without shrinkings, for she knew the feverish energy which Noll could put into any effort to gain what he wanted for the time being—and she knew he had greatly fretted to get into Gérôme's *atelier*.

Beyond ?

She knew his Beyond had been of the vaguest. The jovial comradeship of the schools had roused him to effort. And even whilst she went up to him and embraced him, she wondered whether his eyes had been fixed upon any Beyond. She glowed to the pressure of his jovial embrace ; she felt the delight of his achievement—yet her clear-seeing eyes were afraid for him. He was so easily successful.

They all sallied out together with Betty, roused the Five Foolish Virgins (Moll Davenant's door refused to open) ; and there was cackle and riot as they took a restaurant by storm. The crude

wine had never seemed so mellow, the mystic dishes had not tasted finer at an emperor's banquet—ah ! the mysteries of the cooking-pot never yield such savour as to the palate of youth.

Early on the morning of the fifteenth, a fresh October day, Horace Malahide and Gaston Latour came for Noll ; and he, in mighty high spirits, an easel over his shoulder and a couple of rush-bottomed stools dangling therefrom, hugged Betty and sallied out with the others to face the wild horseplay that greets the coming of the *nouveau* on the opening day in the art schools of Paris.

Betty, leaning over the balcony, kissed her hand to him as the three, looking up, waved their hats, and departed out of the court.

She smiled as she thought of the devilments that would ensue ; and she smiled still more at the thought of Noll, returned from it all, helping her on with her jacket and hurrying her off to dinner, telling her of the amusing details in his rollicking humorous way, with his quaint eye for the quips and oddities of droll situations.

But the day was heavy upon her—she could not bend her will to her work—the hours passed with sullen tread. . . .

As the sun set she began to listen for Noll's footfall. The last sunset glow of the eastern heavens passed into the grey twilight ; the chill breath of the evening warned her that her frequent roamings to the balcony must cease ; she shut the shutters and the window. But the stairs echoed to no sound of Noll's eager return.

It came to the girl for the first time—selfless as she was—that Noll was finding the sufficient delights of life very well without her ; and the thought bit into her heart.

She sighed and arose wearily.

To-night she must dine alone, as she had so often dined alone of late—yet to-night, for the first time, she resented it—was stung by the whisper that it need not have been.

She took her way to the little street of l'Ancienne Comédie. She did not trespass into Noll's noisier cafés—the noise and the disturbance and restlessness distressed her. Noll preferred "life" at the noisier cafés—the greetings were louder.

Betty betook herself languidly now to her dinner, through the white portals of the Café Procope. She stole into a quiet corner, where she was used to sit and think her sweet thoughts, where the pen was always busy. But her weary brain this night was branded with harsh truths from which she could find no hiding-place. She wondered what the great brooding brains that had known this ancient hostel had gnawed upon within these very walls —what petty little insolences had been thrust upon *them* whilst they were "thinking in continents." And she felt it a relief when at last the old-world spirit of the place took possession of her, and she found her wits roaming from herself through the pageant of its past magnificence. The dark atmosphere of its sombre peacefulness was lit for awhile with the glory of its ancient days ; and the dark corners of the Café Procope became haunted with the mighty breath of its Great Dead. These had been no mediocrities, whatever their faults and failings, but big full-blooded Men—their very

sins preposterously magnificent passports to Hell. These were not content to play with the mere toys of life—juggling with echoes.

Fallen into the faded relic of bygone days, this peaceful place has passed into the quietude of the neglected thoroughfare on the narrow footway of which stand its white portals. The strenuous world goes rattling past the end of the old road, unheeding of its one-time magnificence; turns but seldom into its neglected way. Its noisy history is now forgot, its splendid drama remembered by how few of them that live in all this vast splendid city—nay, even by how few of such as have their dingy habitation in this very street, or win the prizes of learning in the illustrious schools of its neighbourhood!

Heretofore had been the very heart of all France—her hot blood had leaped hottest here, sending the throb of its pulsing life to uttermost valley and hamlet of this vast realm. In this little coffee-house, now fallen into neglect, had met together the great wits of France, her master-minds. Nay, rumour hath it that here indeed was very name of coffee-house begotten, begun, made manifest; for here was first given, to France, coffee to chase the dinner and to comfort the stomach of France.

Hither wandering, our Orange William being just come to the throne of England, there had entered into possession, in curly long peruke and somewhat dandified exterior to his shrewd inner man, Master François Procope, in that same year that the Comedy of France took possession of the then Théâtre Français over the way; and, forthwith, glory and fame came to his Café Procope—the wits gathering there to the sipping of coffee and making of elaborate waggeries, not without wrangle, and swords whipped from sullen scabbards, and the like follies manifold. Here had descended from sedan-chair the bent lean figure of Voltaire, his play *Irene* being in rehearsal opposite, and sipped the cup of coffee that was now become the mode in France, the maker of mode. The keen eyes had roved over these panelled walls—here he had stood sneering away the tawdry pretence of popes and kings and laughing to death the diseased and putrid hereditary aristocracy of France. These walls knew the lean mocker well. In yonder sombre little room you shall see still the chair and table at which he was used to sit and write his vitriol jibes, that were the severe medicine for the corrupt body of the decayed nobility.

Here, in fantastic riot, had Rousseau been carried shoulder high after a dramatic triumph; here had Condorcet, in intervals of writing upon the Integral Calculus, been not above horseplay; here had sat Diderot, scheming his encyclopædic schemes, talking tomfool solemn travesties of dangerous talk with winking eye upon his fellow-wags, to lead on the over-zealous police agents to the fussy discovery of large mares' nests of conspiracy.

Nor had jests and badinage been the only fare. In these ghostly dingy mirrors had passed the faces of the great actors in the world tragedy of France. Within these walls had intrigued the master conspirators of the seventeen hundreds. Here had

been put on the first bonnet rouge that was symbol of the coming earthquake of Europe. Here had sat, in yonder corner, fearless, massive great-souled Danton, shockheaded, black haired, playing at chess with the crooked blear-eyed horse-doctor Marat; here had stood, dark-browed, pock-marked, incontinent, bankrupt, the great resolute sane strong man of the Revolution, Mirabeau, the born ruler of men, destined to die of his youth's vices at that very moment when bewildered France was at his feet and had the sorest need of him; here, too, that other pock-pitted fellow, the dandified sphinx of the madness, "seagreen" Robespierre, crafty, merciless; here had throbbed the heart of Camille Desmoulins, who lost his head in plea for mercifulness, bearding the bloody madness of the Terror with proposal for a Committee of Mercy that keeps his memory sweet as the mellow syllables of his name to all eternity—here with d'Holbach he had sat or paced, airing hot enthusiasms, plunging deeper into dangers their clean souls scarce realized—moving forward to high dramatic destinies none could foretell, godlike, to the guillotine and betrayal and death and broken illusions. Here, too, forger, thief, and liar, had stood Hébert, one of the foullest blots on the Revolution, stood at that door upon that table of Voltaire's, and, mouthing his Sacred Right of Insurrection, harangued the fierce crowd that packed the narrow thoroughfare, exciting them to the black brutalities of the Terror, stamping his great vulgar foot in passionate frenzy of murderous blasphemies upon the table top so that the heel of his heavy boot split the marble across—he who most damnably lied away the fame of the poor doomed foolish queen where she stood at trial alone amongst her hellish enemies—he who "hated the word Mercy"—here he had sat, little dreaming that his filthy neck should be slit in agony of craven appeal by the very laws of his own planning.

Nay, within these very walls had been conspiracy within conspiracy—massacres planned—the killing beginning at these demure white doors.

Here, on that August day that the Monarchy fell, had sat Madame Roland and Lucille Desmoulins, the sweet and beautiful and rich mate of famed Camille, together with Madame Danton, their ears athrob with ringing of bells and roar of cannon—the shadow of the guillotine not flung as yet their way, unsuspected, their eyes as yet not seeing, their white necks not feeling, that harsh doom either for themselves or their lords.

Hence one day a genial, dreamy, kindly young officer of artillery they called Napoleon Buonaparte, that lived at a small lodging in a street hard by, walked out bareheaded, leaving his cocked hat as security for his reckoning, having forgotten his purse. Here, in days not so long past, Gambetta fumed and raved and swore and dreamed and spouted, holding the Republic together as best he could, a Republic broken with a dozen warring internecine strifes and petty interests.

Here, the old café having fallen on more peaceful days and slow decay in its neglected thoroughfare, the poor dirty shabby genius

that was called Paul Verlaine sat at the dead Voltaire's table, and wrote on scraps of paper his now world-famous lyrics.

The greatest of these had been mighty workers, men of iron toil. These had not been content to thrum little five-fingered echoes of the great music of the drama of life—these had created their own music, their own methods, their own art. No man shall come to greatness through juggling with echoes. These had made their own style to express themselves—had no need of the elaborate polishing of the tricks and ornaments of the mediocrities who, having nothing to express, filch little movements and sounds from the vasty music of the masters to cover their own little insignificance—who in toil to polish phrases miss the statement. Nay, these men had not been content with praise of mediocrities—had scorned even their approval.

When, an hour before midnight, Betty, going homewards, passed the house where Moll Davenant lived, she became aware of hoarse whispers ; looking up the dark side street as she crossed the road, she saw a man standing on another's shoulder peering into the lighted room within—the widow Snacheur's room. The fellow leaped down, and the pair of them calmly sauntered down the alley.

Betty hurried on, vaguely wondering. She reached the house where she lodged, and found the great gates shut. It came to her that it was the first time she had felt a certain shrinking from ringing the bell in the concierge's den—the first time she had felt alone ; the first time she had tried to find an excuse for being alone.

She rang—the postern opened with a clank—she stepped in, shut it, called her name as she passed the concierge's window, and climbed her stairs wearily.

It was very late, yet she had no fear that Noll had returned to find no welcome.

She laughed sadly.

It dawned upon her that it was she who had always returned unwelcomed to the empty hearth. He was probably leading the laugh at some fantastic tavern's goodfellowship. . . .

As she let herself into her room, her glance fell on a note that had been slipped under the door. She picked it up, lit her lamp, and opened the letter listlessly : it was from the Disturber of Funerals—her heart warmed to the genial handwriting, at the thought of the big-hearted kindly man. As she read, her own loneliness fell from her, her own affairs as usual became as naught. Her eyes grew serious. Dick Davenant was off to America, recalled by his people on urgent summons ; he would catch the Atlantic liner from England—would Betty, like the good comrade she was, watch over Molly until he returned—she was grown full of strange moods and kept him from her—he was at a loss. . . .

" I will go to her at daybreak," Betty said ; and languidly she undressed.

She lay down on her bed ; and the pillow that had known so many bright dreams, ambitions, hopes, was for the first time wet with Betty's scalding tears.

CHAPTER LVII

Which treats of what chanced at the Tavern of The Scarlet Jackass

And Noll?

It was close on midnight. In the smoke-laden air that made a blue haze within the quaint tavern of *The Scarlet Jackass*, up and down the narrow gangway between the crowded tables paced restlessly the nervous figure of its artist-landlord, André Joyeux.

He wheeled round, and flung a phrase at the room ; and a loud burst of laughter greeted the sally.

At the tables, smoking, chatting, their glasses of milky absinthe and tankards of ale before them, sat journalists, artists, poets, poetesses, students, bohemians, women, musicians, and a soldier or so.

At one table was a group of students from Gérôme's *atelier*, with Horace Malahide, Gaston Latour, Noll.

Early in the evening, as they dined, André Joyeux became possessed of all the latest news of the town—political moves, social happenings, scandals, theatrical gossip, literary events, before these things were yet in print, often before they were written ; and as he now walked up and down, haranguing, he made his satiric comments upon it all.

He smiled at the roar of laughter and applause. As he turned on his heel at the end of the room, his glance fell on a wizened little old man in gold-rimmed spectacles, who sat bent, and huddled, and drowsing, his arms folded on the table before a glass of absinthe, a wreath of white roses with which he had been crowned earlier in the evening pulled slanting over one sleepy eye.

André Joyeux stopped in his stride :

" What, poet !" cried he, with a laugh, " thy wreath is 'awry." He clapped it on the back of the old man's head. " What, thou sleepest on the very steps of the altar of Fame ! Thy brains are drowsy with the fumes of the incense in the very temple of Wit ; so Genius, hiccupping with wine, misses his footing at the very threshold of Immortality ! . . . Tsha !" He turned on his heels and continued his walk, striding down the room again. " Sleep if thou must—thou canst read during to-morrow, twenty-four hours late, and at thy leisure on the boulevards with the pot-bellied trader, the world's news that will be stale here with the snuffing of to-night's candles ; and thou wilt get thy news, too, devoid of wit, without colour, stale and

dull and flat as long-drawn small-beer, and twisted and distorted and debauched to the uses of each journal."

But the vague eyes of the little old mad poet had closed, and he was nodding over his glass. André Joyeux laughed:

"Our old singer of tuneless songs comes from the Latin Quarter, across the river, comrades," said he—"he has the drowsy habits of the academies—it is always so over there—on the flats across the river, with their vaunted universities and isms and ologies. The professors with dandruff on collar, and the students with talk of new ideas and of the new generation, what do they know of life?"

He flung out his arm as he strode to and fro:

"Tush! they have books down there, ridiculous printed things to *tell* them of life! to tell them what other people think of life! . . . They have museums, dry holes where bits of the dead past are stored in glass cases. They have talk of architecture that is dead and useless architecture—schools are endowed to teach it—nay, schools are endowed to tell of what it used to be. . . . They hang up armour, and write books about it—about armour!" He laughed loud and long. "They might as well write about cooking-pots and discarded tin cans with holes in them. . . . They will. . . . They talk of relics of the past—nay, they worship them—build churches to them. They collect things—coins, postage-stamps, what-not. They will collect spittoons next. They form societies—learned societies to pester each other with things that do not matter. They peer at old pictures that have lost their vital significance, completed their function—build public galleries for them, each room a nightmare of incongruous warring canvases, lost to their original intention over a church's altar or what not, wrangling together, inadequate, foreign, out of place. As though by the looking upon Cromwell's bones or Napoleon's breeches they would learn to rule the world! Students pay to see these things—spend the precious years of youth poring over them, even copying them! The delirious years of youth! . . . They call it culture. Gods! culture! . . . To the Latin Quarter, to the professors, dandruff-collared, to the gaping student, life is this dusty dull study of what is dusty and dull and stupid and dead. . . . We of the Hill of Martyrs, it is we who know what is life. Stand at your doors in our steep streets, climb you up yonder to the top of the hill, up with you to the topmost scaffolding of the preposterous cathedral of the Sacred Heart that is a-building, topped with cupolas that shall stand like giant onions to acclaim the sins of garlic-eating burgess France, and look down—condescend to Paris. Between us and the river, with Latin Quarter beyond, glitter the lights of a different Paris, another world—a Paris that knows as little of us of the hill as of the professors of the Latin Quarter yonder—a Paris of the boulevards, a Paris of the aristocrat and of the burgess—a world that knows little of poetry or of learning, and tries to forget what it knows; a world that despises us as we despise it; that shuns us as we shun it. There the burgess, with sole ambition the desire to best his neighbour, plods in glum respectability his mean inglorious day, yet once in a blue moon struts his holiday, his limbs cramped with lack of use to live, his only law of life a fear of his neighbour's opinion, his object in life to put a number of coins in a bank, to grow full-bodied in the doing, and

marry a wife and reproduce his ignoble species. His furthest ambition to grow very old. God ! what a life ! Yet is his end like ours who live one long holiday—to die and rot like any lousy beggar, or prince, or cardinal. For the avoidance of this his bank cannot serve—he can write no letter of credit that shall avail him beyond his length of earth."

"Ay, André—they exist ; they do not live," cried a young fellow of pallid countenance, whose hand, thin, and white, and delicate as a woman's, shook as he raised his glass of absinthe to his lips.

André Joyeux laughed in his stride :

"Ay, comrades," said he—"it is we on the Hill of Martyrs who *live*. . . . Climb Montmartre, and you are in a rare atmosphere—get you up amongst the scaffolding a-top of it, and you may touch the clouds—the air is light, vivacious, exciting as wine—solemn things and dull talk fall away from you—you must stoop if you would kiss the hand to Paris, stoop to hail her, stoop to see her. Here we condescend to the world. We are amongst the clouds—breathe the air the gods have breathed. We have here no rare inclinations to riot—here *life* is a riot. Down there they toil and moil all day through, all the months, to snatch infrequent glimpses of life, that they have not the habit to enjoy. Tush !" He laughed. "They call it a *holiday !* Ho, Ho, Ho ! a holiday ! . . . They lie down at the ticking of a clock—sleep at the bidding of their task-masters—awake at the striking of a clock to work their fingers to the bone for a shabby grave. Worse still, work others' fingers to the bone, even the fingers of woman and child, this pitiful scourged crew, to make rich the brutish vulgarians whom they so fantastically serve. God ! what a hell's stew ! . . . With the darkness they lie down and go to sleep—to awake with the daylight to further toil and moil again. A Russian grand-duke steals their prettiest daughter for a week or more, then takes another. The rich, who are their idols, misuse their beautiful women ; so they look up to the rich. . . . But we ! we live all the while. If we've a mind to it, we rejoice in the night—we sleep when we will—live whilst we may. Life's but for a few flitting years at best. These others are so mad they think us mad who know them mad. . . . If we are mad——"

He stopped a waiter who passed with a tray of tumblers filled with absinthe. His hand shook so that he spilled some liquor as he raised a glass :

"If we are mad, then here's to madness !"

They roared with laughter, banged their fists upon the board, raised their glasses and drank with him. He emptied the glass and flung it to a waiter.

"If theirs be sanity to huddle in foul dens, feed on the Mad Cow of Hunger, scowl sullenly at life from work-stunned eyes, all to fill the purse of pot-bellied tradesmen, to build with their blood and toil the vulgar habitations of their pretentious vulgarity, then 'twere better to be mad. . . . And no worse than Sanity. . . . We too have tasted the flesh of the Mad Cow, but we have not sold our souls for bread, nor our lives to be allowed to rummage on a dunghill." He held out his hands and grasped the air, adding with hoarse passion : "We live, I say—we live."

He stood proudly, and gazed at the applause.

They called to him to sing ; and he stood there and sang the song that held Paris ; and as he sang the refrain, they all burst into the chorus :

"Proud as kings and loud as carters,
Live we who live on the Hill of Martyrs."

When the rousing chorus was done, amidst thunders of applause, fists banged upon the tables, André Joyeux mounted a chair :

"Our exquisite singer and friend, Adolphe St. Pierre, is unable to keep his engagement to-night," said he. "But our ancient friend, Paul de Gattepoésie, will take his place," he added.

There was ironic applause.

The old man with wreath of roses on his head, rousing from his stupor at the nudgings of those that sat near, arose from his chair and, with a smile, shuffled towards the piano. He took his place in serious conceit as the player ran through the refrain of a lilt, and, in a broken voice, he began to utter the verse of his song. But he forgot the words, and the piano finished without him. There was a titter. His vague eyes lighted up again and he started to utter another mood, and again the piano finished without him. And thus, standing there, his straying wits roamed through the maze of the bewildering land of the mad—inconsequently, unabashed, pathetic, unashamed. . . . He had loved a maid that was red—and swore his allegiance—and she was very beautiful—but somehow he came to love a maid that was white—but she had a mother—and the maid that was red did not like it—so she drowned herself in the lake, a clammy, forbidding, ill-smelling lake—but it was the mother that, somehow, made him love a girl that was dark—but she had a brother—and—and—the magistrate asked him why he drank strong drinks—but he said he had but drunk the milk of the Mad Cow——

The rose garland slipped forward and came down over his eyes, when in the midst of the buffooning laughter that greeted the accident the doors of the tavern were flung open and several Salvation Army girls entered the room.

The old mad poet blinked at the interruption, sighed, and shuffled back to his seat and his absinthe.

André Joyeux rose and went forward to greet the Salvation lasses, received them gently, and asked them if they would sing. One of the girls nodded, ran a few notes on a droning concertina, a tambourine was struck and chinked, and the Salvation Army lass raised her voice in song—the strange sound of an English hymn sung in French with rough true notes, and with passionate eagerness declaring the glory of God and the gentleness of the Christ in this fantastic place of worn-out moods and critical art-sense. At the next verse the chant was taken up by the other women, to the threat of hell-fire, the dread of judgment, the fierce revelling in the blood of Christ, the promise of eternal life amidst the glory of the angels ; the girls' voices gave out a last hoarse shout of praise, and the tavern rang with the riot of applause. André Joyeux went and thanked them prettily.

When the girls had trooped out of the place he watched the door close upon them :

"God !" said he—"what enthusiasm ! . . . It is very dramatic."

The company rose to go, giving André good-night as they went out, and, it being near midnight, Noll and Horace, and the others with them from Gérôme's *atelier*, were about to go also and leave the regular frequenters of the place to their intimate gossip in the closed tavern, when André came down to them and asked them to stay. He took them round and showed a sketch of Noll's framed amongst the many works of celebrities that hung upon the walls. "My friend, you are an artist," said he. . . . They went and sat down at André's table. The others all moved up about them. There was more beer, more absinthe. "The tavern is now closed," said he—"you are my guests."

The talk became more intimate.

André Joyeux would rise from his seat between the rallies, restlessly pacing the half-empty room, gesticulating, laughing, frowning, droll—bending his whole wits to the point at issue. His trenchant mind took on a lighter humour. Whatever topic came up, when he felt about it and did not let it pass him with uncaring eyes, he would get up from his seat and get to pacing the room again, playing with it, extolling or condemning, criticising, turning it over and inside out, his keen wit tearing it to shreds or weaving for it a wreath of bays—ever and anon moistening his throat, tilting his glass of absinthe in his shapely white hands.

An hour after midnight he was more than exhausted.

He called for supper. . . .

He drank ; none deeper. His talk was wild, his quick tongue and nimble brain were matched against some of the keenest wits of Paris, and his sharp satiric rallies, his rollicking and fantastic humour, never showed to greater advantage than on that night. . . .

Some young fellow asked why Adolphe St. Pierre had not sung this night ; it was a somewhat unhappy query, and André Joyeux's quick ears caught it. It set him brooding ; the laughter went out of his eyes :

"His nerves have gone," he said—"this morning at daybreak he became violent—dangerous—about the double genitive." He smiled sadly. "It took four poets and a journalist to hold him down, and a musician to pluck at the locked door and wring his hands and say how dreadful it was. . . . Poor Adolphe ! he is gone quite mad."

The pale youth touched André Joyeux on the sleeve with trembling fingers :

"Comrade," said he—"your life is a furnace, burning night and day—you, too, will go mad."

He laughed a rough laugh, boisterously unmirthful ; raised his glass ; tossed it off :

"That is what they used to say to Rodolph Salis," said he hoarsely—"that is what they used to say to Rodolph Salis. . . . Ah, that was a man. He knew how to live. . . ." He got up, his hands twitching, and paced the room again : "It was Rodolph Salis that brought *the wits* to Montmartre. It was Rodolph Salis who saw that Genius would condescend to roar at the tavern, not to snore at the academy—it was Rodolph Salis who saw that as artist he could only be one of many, but as tavern-keeper he might be immortal—so it came that Rodolph created the most renowned tavern of France—so it came that Rodolph Salis opened the tavern of *The Black Cat ;* and

to its artistic rooms, in the atmosphere of masterpieces hung on the walls round about amongst its old dark panelling, under the dim lights of its wrought-iron lamps, the wits foregathered to godlike entertainment. On those walls the pencil of Steinlen had traced a masterpiece, and Willette's dainty fingers drawn the nervous laughing line; there, seated before his glass of absinthe, I have seen Paul Verlaine write the exquisite lyrics of France; there, among the splendid riot, have sat Daudet, and Zola, and Richepin, Meissonier and Puvis de Chavannes and the rest. . . . Hoho! Salis put his waiters into the livery of the Forty Immortals, green coats and green leaves and breeches and silk stockings and all—put his flunkies into the habit of them that drowse at the Academy down yonder across the river, each snoring in his seat, the fortieth part of Immortality, sleeping away the honour of France, between bouts of cudgelling their dullard wits to produce the printed book. Tshah! where are the Immortals, the gods? Outside. Outside and aloof they stand—Molière and Rabelais and Balzac, Diderot and Rousseau, Victor Hugo and Georges Sand, Montaigne and De Musset, Zola and Verlaine, Daudet and Flaubert and Baudelaire and Théophile Gautier. . . . And whilst the Fortieth parts of Immortality each slept, smugly overfilling his breeches' girth, loading the Academy with dull breathing, Rodolph Salis called the wits together: and at his call the immortals flung the immortal phrase round about the board, tossed to and fro the splendid jest in his tavern of *The Black Cat*. Day and night, spontaneous, full-blooded, polished, they lived their scintillating life. . . . I can see Rodolph, orange-haired, orange-bearded, pale, green-eyed, his wondrous white hands restless with the leaping pulse and quick nerve, as he was wont to sit at dinner with the wits. *There* was the real Academy of France. Ay, his waiters most fitly wore the leafed green coats and breeches of the Fortieth part of Immortality! . . . Ah, how the wine glowed! . . . With the dessert, Rodolph, sipping his coffee, listened with furrowed brow to the latest news, weighing it, testing it—the most brilliant journalists of France at his elbow. The quips, the jests, the biting comment! It was the centre of the world! . . . I can hear their literary criticism destroy a life's work in a *mot*, fling immortal honour in a phrase, tossed in epigram across the table, and back again another as keen-edged—the last gossip of the stage—the loud hilarious scandal. . . . I can see Rodolph, the brows wrinkled in mighty furrows of keen attention as the poets read their lines—can hear his bravas that made men rich and set their blood tingling—can pluck out of the dead years the condemning thunders of his dispraise, can catch his deft wit polishing a blundering line. . . . But for Rodolph Salis many a poet, singer, artist had been this day in his garret, unknown—trudging, down at heels, the Undiscovered Country. But the artist in him! never forgetting his magnificence that he kept the tavern of France. . . . Hoho! I can hear the jovial laugh: 'My lords,' he'd cry, 'the time has come for the nobility and self-respecting gentlemen to demand a fresh tankard of ale.' Hoho! that was a king of tavern lords! Then the golden ale went round—the cloudy absinthe. . . . And when the room began to fill and the time for shadow-shows to begin, Salis was in full stride. Affable to his guests, always the good host, well-bred, polished, good-humoured

giving the stranger rank of nobility, he would show 'monseigneur' with pride of possession the cats that were limned upon the walls, the sketches, the glories of his ancient place ; and lead the way to the shadow-show upstairs, sketches of France's genius on the stair's walls, hanging everywhere—and he so proud of it all ! I can see him stride up and down the passage of the shadow theatre up there, as the witty pictures fell in black silhouette across the white sheet of the theatre's round proscenium, his gay laugh, his running whimsical comment on affairs, his fierce biting denunciations, the flashing green eyes, the nervous white hand—God ! what a fire burned there ! . . . Ah, what songs, what poesie, what rhapsodies, what quaintly spoken words have sounded within those walls ! . . . At midnight when the crowd was gone, as we sit here to-night, he was alone with the wits again—and the wine glowed, and the cloudy absinthe went round—and there was supper that the gods had envied to the tune of the wild badinage that was tossed about the board. And he, Rodolph Salis, the brightest star ! . . . How the ghosts of the Great Dead have arisen at our summons, and walked there ! . . . Tshah ! *there* was the Academy of the world. . . . But—he—one day—found his nerves were gone—he took to his bed. . . . Even amidst the rousing chorus in the wind that passed, his quick ears had heard the Old Reaper's whetstone upon the sickle—he heard the whisper of Doom—and the nimble wit of Rodolph Salis had never missed the intention of the most subtle hint. He tossed his jibe to Death. And who with more weighty right to the insolence ? He had known life——"

André Joyeux ceased speaking ; stood brooding ; roused ; striding to his place, he raised a glass—his hand shook——

The room was deathly still.

"Rodolph Salis knew life," he said hoarsely.

There was silence whilst he drank ; and again he got to his restless pacing :

"There was one man in all this wide world," said he, "who was glad when the sign of *The Black Cat* was taken down—that man was Rodolph's brother, Gabriel Salis. They had been estranged from the time of Gabriel's setting up this tavern of *The Scarlet Jackass*, hating each other's successes, jealous that the same mother had endowed them with equal wit, resentful of each other's magnificence. . . ."

He strode up and down several times in silence.

"And Rodolph being dead," said he—"Gabriel reigned in his stead. . . . Here within these walls his wit flashed."

He swept his arm proudly round the room and strode off again :

"And—because his hand shook—and—his tongue wagged feverishly, speaking the fantastic thinkings of that teeming imagination, they cried out that he, too, would go mad ; and he, raising his glass as Rodolph had done in trembling fingers, would laugh boisterously. . . . But—Gabriel, too, heard the whisper—he feared to die the death that Rodolph died—and the tavern of *The Scarlet Jackass* passed to André Joyeux."

He laughed, wheeled round, and swept his hand towards the flaring poster at the end of the room :

"There have I drawn Gabriel on his scarlet jackass, bags of gold

about him, trotting away to the fresh air of the fields to the country house he had bought——"

He moved down the room again, moodily:

"But he, too, took to his bed—he had lived his life—he missed his glass, his fellows, the rousing chorus, the jovial good fellowship. He was bored. He took to his bed——"

André Joyeux paced in moody silence a couple of turns up and down the room, went to his place, raised a glass and drained it to the dregs:

"And now the wits feast with me. . . . Steinlen, and thou, Toulouse Lautrec! ye drink in Joyeux's tavern. And thou, Willette! though thou didst draw that red ass there in likeness of Rodolph Salis, because thou hadst thy quarrel with him—thou at least quarrelled with a man. . . . God! I have drunk wine here with Paul Verlaine, first lyric poet of France. Ay," said he—"why poor Rodolph? why poor Gabriel? why poor St. Pierre?"

And he added hoarsely:

"I tell you these men were not afraid to live. They were men. They were not—afraid—to—live. . . ."

In the smoky twilight that goes before the dawn, as the purple night moved westward over the city, sweeping the world with dusky train, the doorkeeper in fantastic livery, his cocked hat on the back of his head, yawned, as beadles yawn at sermon-time, and unlocked the door of the tavern that is called *The Scarlet Jackass*, to let the revellers pass out into the street, Noll and the young students along with them.

They stood on the pavement in the chill air to make an end of their last gossip before parting on their separate ways.

Several were giddy with the haze of their potations, and, having lurched out into the open world, more than one stood with difficulty, though none were wanting in the desire for dignity.

All night long, Noll and Horace Malahide had been stealthily exchanging their full glasses for the emptied glasses of beer-soaking bohemians; but, even so, the fumes of the place were in their brains, and the fresh air made them both for a moment light-headed. The old bibbers of the place, stupid and smoke-stained, and sphinx-like in reserve, stepped out of the tavern cautiously, pale, weary, and nerveless. As the old poet, with his wreath of wilted white roses, lurched out into the night, the door-keeper shut and locked the door from within. The old man tripped over his own feet, stumbled, and sat down suddenly on the footpath, whence he bade them all good-night repeatedly, and fervently recommended them to the care of God.

The pale youth, holding Noll's arm, which he had seized, said, with a hiccup:

"Mon Dieu, what a night!"

"Ay," said the frequenters, shivering with the cold, and drawing their thin cloaks about them—"what a night!"

The pale youth burst into tears, and made as though to fling his arms round Noll's neck, but missed his calculation, and fell over the wreath-crowned old Gattepoésie. He tried to pick himself up; and, as he stood on all fours, he said, with a hiccup:

"He will go mad."

"Ah, yes," said an old bohemian—"they knew how to live—they knew how to live."

They all sighed:

"Yes," said they—"they knew how to live."

The bell rang and clinked and swung, hoarsely complaining, over the bed in the little dark den of the concierge; and Madame Hodendouche, rousing sulkily, sat up amongst her bedclothes and pulled the string viciously that drew the bolt of the postern in the great gate outside, muttering a snuffling curse on the lateness of the night.

"Ring—ring—ring, thou pestilence!" she scolded savagely.

The gate outside shut with a slam, feet tramped past, a voice called, and all was silence again.

"Hodendouche," she said sulkily to her snoring bedfellow—"the Englishman does not give madame too much of his company in these days—I had thought them lovers, but they are indeed married. He is ever more late now."

She settled her fat little body down amongst the bedclothes:

"Yes, thou mayest well snore, Hodendouche, thou lazy hog—but I kept the Englishman ringing till he broke even thy sleep, and a good cooling will do the fine fellow no ill. He has rung off and on this good half-hour—I only fear he may have taken some varnish off the gate with his pestiferous kickings and knockings. . . ."

In the smoky twilight Noll softly entered the shadows of the room, and as he gently closed the door, he heard Betty toss restlessly in troubled sleep.

He went and sat down upon the side of the bed:

"Betty," said he, taking her hand, "can't you sleep?"

She drew his hand into the warm bed, and folded it under her warm fingers against her breast:

"Have you had a happy day, Noll?" she asked.

Noll yawned—he was very weary. . . .

All day he had forgotten Betty; he was now so occupied with his own weariness that he dully failed to see there was one in his life who was selflessly eager to hear of his doings. As he unlaced his boots and undressed, he told her baldly of his day's adventures, but he scarcely troubled to recall the events—he was very sleepy, he said. Indeed, he had been shining all day, and, however attentive this single audience, it was not the same thing as the rousing applause that made his wits glitter in the midst of the wild good-fellowship. His adventures, robbed of the drolleries and stripped of the fantastic details that had made the laughter and the interest, sounded tedious enough.

Ah, Noll, thou numskull! hath it not dawned upon thee, then, that thou canst kill this all so precious love for thee by these ignorings of it—just as much by neglect of her for the goodwill of thy rollicking so-called friends as by neglect of her for another woman? Indeed, the difference is but a toy of hypocrisy. If thou must drift off to selfish pursuits, what boots it that thy pursuit be this or that or the other? If thou must needs bawl thy share of the chorus in the night-haunts of the poetasters, why not have her dear companionship beside

thee? Does it fulfil thy manhood the more to frequent the taverns at night in the boon fellowship of these little spendthrift intelligences? Hast thou more of magnificence in this killing of time than in the sweet comradeship of this one whose name is like to ring out over the four corners of the world wheresoever thy language is spoken? In the years to come the greatest will seek her companionship, treasure her smile; yet she will be the same woman then, is therefore the same now—if thou hadst but the world's acclamation to point thee to it.

CHAPTER LVIII

Wherein the Tears of Compassion heal the Bleeding Feet of a Straying Woman

Betty fell feverishly a-drowsing as the chill dawn crept stealthily into the room. When she awoke, Noll was still sleeping.

As she sat up in bed, heavy with unfinished sleep, she remembered the letter of the night before. She slipped out of bed and dressed.

She descended gloomy stairways that were still haunted by the lingering shadows of the departed night.

She hurried to Moll Davenant's quarters.

The leaves were falling from the trees, and their bitter scent filled the air with the pungent fragrance of late autumn.

Betty had not seen Moll for some weeks now—the door had been sternly closed to her knock. But she decided to haunt the threshold until she got admittance.

There was little need for setting the will to a stern resolution. As Betty reached the topmost step of the high climb she paused to take breath ; and from within the door she heard the harsh cough that told of the girl's struggle for life.

She knocked, and, waiting for another fit of coughing to pass, she knocked again.

A dreary pause, and the door opened.

Babette's face peered round it. She put her finger to her lip and came out on to the landing, kissed Betty, tears in her eyes, and said :

" She is dying. I got admittance two days ago."

Betty went in, and as she halted on the threshold, her heart stood still.

Seated on the side of her bed, in her poor worn nightgown, was Moll Davenant, struggling for breath.

Betty ran to her, knelt down beside her, and drew a blanket about the shoulders and limbs ; and, as she did so, she saw that her body was wasted as with old age. She saw also, with the quick sight that is given to us in emotional moments, that the place was well kept—proofs of the care of Babette's hands were everywhere.

Moll Davenant stopped coughing, and a smile came into her eyes. She let Betty put her gently into the warm bed.

"Betty, dear heart," said she—"kneel by my bed, that I may keep my hand on your head a little while. . . . I am broken—broken—wounded—dying. . . . But God in His mercy has sent you—and my feet have ceased to bleed—there are no thorns upon the road now—no roughnesses. I cease from stumbling. And there is the light—flashing up—from afar. And the song of birds. The spring must be coming. . . . I have nearly gone mad for want of you——"

"Sh-sh! Molly—I am here," she said.

As Eustace Lovegood stepped to Molly's bed, the others slipped quietly from the lamp-lit room. . . .

The big man had been seated on the side of the bed some time, with Moll's slender fingers in his great hand, when she awoke and found him there.

She leaped up and clasped her arms about him, as a frightened child runs and hides itself in its mother's skirts.

"Molly," said he, taking her terrified face between his hands and holding her eyes to his until the pallid face of fear became a flush of shyness: "Molly, you are not frightened?"

She buried her face on his neck:

"I have been a mistake—a large mistake, all through," she said.

She was seized with a violent fit of coughing.

The big man put her gently into the bed—the air was nipping, spite of the room's warmth.

"No, Moll, you always overstate a case." He smiled sadly. "You even admire my verses."

She laughed in spite of herself—gladly; but fear lurked in her eyes. Her mood turned to sudden terror. She leaped up, and held him with fearful hands—the sweat stood in cold beads upon her flesh:

"For God's sake, Eustace; don't go away again——"

"No, Moll—I will never go away again."

He soothed her, racked with the torture of violent coughing, her veins standing out like cords upon the torn meagre body; and as the struggle ran down he set her gently back amongst the pillows and warm bedclothes.

"Molly, you must be still—Betty sent me word that you were ill—and I have come."

She lay, her eyes closed, her hand in the big protecting hand of the great-hearted man who sat beside her: lay so quietly there that he thought she slept.

After awhile she turned to him and spoke:

"I have lain here, panic-stricken, doomed, wholly terrified, alone—in my ears the sound of the worm's nibble eating through the dull wood of the narrow confining coffin—I have smelt corruption—I have died many times—discarded—a rejected thing—flung into an unwept grave——"

"Hush, Molly——"

She smiled :

" Tush," said she, " it is finished. I do not even fear to recall it. It's but a ghost's walk seen by daylight—a ridicule that in the night was a tragedy. Now there comes to me the fragrance of flowers. I am in the arms of the sweet brown earth. I rise through sap and root and stem and blossom of the dear plants to become life again, and a part of the sweet exhalation of eternity. My heart's blood leaps within me—I am glad. . . . Your voice fills my ears, dear heart—if God's be only as exquisite ! . . . Yours and Betty's and this tender Babette's—the voices of them that I love are the refrain of an eternal hymn to me."

" Molly "—he knelt beside her—" I am glad then that I have come."

She ran her slender fingers over his hands with loving touch :

" I have been polluted," she said. " They whispered, with evil satyr eyes upon me, of what they called Love—and I had so little a while to live—and I went. They stripped me naked, body and soul, and took me furtively down the mean ways of adultery. . . . Oh, it was such shabby, shabby sin !"

" Hush, Molly !"

" But Betty came—and the sunlight with her—and sweetness and delight. And this other wounded woman brought me the light—brought her to me—led me into pleasant ways again. . . . And thou, dear heart, at the end of the journeying—that I might know love before I died."

She sat up suddenly :

" But I am wasted, shrivelled, withered like the old," she said —" look at me and see it."

She watched him hungrily, with anxious eyes.

He put his arms about her and held her to him.

She flung her arms about his great head, and held his face close to her :

" It is worth dying—to have loved a *man*," she said.

She lay back quietly for a long while, gazing at the big fellow, who put her back so gently amongst the propping pillows, where he sat beside her. Her eyes were rid of frown and fret, suspicion and distrust gone wholly from her. She held his hand in pathetic transparent fingers ; and a smile played about the corners of her mouth :

" Thou art wholly mine," she said. " They will none know thee as I know thee, my beloved—the hearing of none will hang expectant on thy footfall as my hearing has served thee—none will wait upon thy dear whims as my whims have waited—the notes and shades of thy dear voice shall arouse in none other the sweet reverberations that have echoed in the hollows of my quick ears. . . . Thou wilt bury with me thy largest self. . . . I die wholly rich. . . . The rest may have the unessential husk of thee. . . . Thou hast given me the Realities. . . . Thou hast brought me into Paradise. . . ."

For near upon a month Moll Davenant lay a-dying to the

sublime litany of a great passion ; and in her dying touched the hem of the garment that veils the majesty of Life.

She died on the Day of the Dead—her slender fingers in Betty's —passed, with a little sigh of glad relief to be asleep, into the eternal mystery.

Eustace Lovegood, his head buried in his arms, knelt by the bed. He was roused to consciousness of death by a sob from Betty as she touched the sightless eyes and drew down the blinds of the dead woman's soul.

" Betty," said he, a great tear trickling slowly down the gentle fellow's pale cheek, " she was happy, indeed, to go into the dark holding your dear hand."

The last leaves of the year were falling, a threadbare russet carpet to their feet, as they bore Moll's still white body to her grave. Babette with Betty added the holiness of her innocent heart's service to the simple dignity of the slow procession.

As they turned out of the street into the Boule Miche, all wayfarers halting and standing with heads uncovered as the poor silent body passed to its chill resting-place—children ceasing from play, hushedly, to pull off caps of reverence ; workmen and loafers, students and women, merchants and servants, paying homage to that strange procession of the dead which all must one day lead—a workman turned to another :

" Poor soul," said he, with a great pity—" she will never walk Paris again."

So might that sorrowing angel have spoken as, with irrevocable clang, he sadly shut on departing Eve the excluding gates of Paradise.

CHAPTER LIX

Wherein it is suspect that our Betty has the Healing Touch

BETTY had early perceived, with wise foreseeing eyes, that life's scheme is not work nor leisure nor sleep. The human day is compact of all that makes for happy sanity—work and rest and the decent pleasures that are called recreation—each as important as the other, each a part of the triple crown that tops the human day's achievement. Every mortal has the birthright to this splendid heritage ; and where there is lack in the three, there has been filching. There be foul rogues who ever shirk the toil, and such must of necessity steal another's leisure to overfill his own measure.

Work Betty never shirked.

The work done, she would go for the bracing walk along the banks of the Seine before the dusk fell in tender greys upon the quays of the city. Or the Foolish Virgins, one or several, would call up into the twilight, whooping her down from her high lodgment, and take her for a ramble along the quays or into the elaborately planned wildness of the city's woods, or straight across the river into the boulevards with their glitter and colour and the shops of fashion ; or away up to the heights of Montmartre they would step it, climbing the steep streets to look down upon the city, and home again, loitering before print-shops and places where they sell artistic things. And the "boys" would always halt before the *modes*, that Betty might have a good hint of the fashion—they were proud of her beauty, proud of her comradeship. Babette, too, would come, and, as they went, talk her genial frank talk, full of shrewd observation and worldly wisdom. Bartholomew Doome, too, more than once, had been of the party—another Doome, without a hint of sin upon his lips, a strange Doome who was without pose, devoid of Byronic gloom, lacking as to insincerities, a Doome who spoke tenderly of children and showed intimate and wondrous knowledge of their ways—altogether an astounding strange Doome.

Noll, only, was now too often absent. He had other things to do—had "something on"—urgent nothings amongst the nobodies.

It is the busy people that find time to do everything—but to

be wholly idle. The idle it is that have no leisure to be anything but idle.

Indeed, Betty was busy enough in these days. It came as an instinct that she should be the healer. As a wounded child, with confident appeal, looks to the grown-up to banish pain, so such as were in distress plucked at Betty's sleeve asking comfort. When a student lay dying, he would always send for Betty—when one raved in restless delirium of fever it was Betty that sat writing by the bed and brought gentleness into the harsh atmosphere—it was to Betty's discreet ears that was unfolded the long-hidden tangle of the secret man, the struggle of the troubled soul flinching from the cowardice of its own shabby reservations—Betty's hands that quieted the restless brain, and her calm command that brought back honour. Her dear ears were shut to all strange peevishness or conceit that the unmasked egoist unconsciously uttered. Her presence cleansed the talk, her sweet humour raised the clean laugh, her intelligence roused the sense of dignity, and the gaiety of her fresh young vigorous womanhood made of the sickroom a pleasaunce, and of the world outside a garden of fragrant blossom.

And Babette, who was fellow conspirator in her offices, and hung upon her ordering, though she had a gossip tongue, knew no English.

CHAPTER LX

Wherein Betty feels the Keen Breath of Winter

Noll took it all very much for granted, this large-hearted service of Betty to her fellows. He felt that it reflected the very greatest credit on her womanhood. It added stature to her natural dignity.

When Betty had been away, watching over the last flickering days of Moll Davenant, it seemed natural enough—it was perhaps a little lonely at moments—but he arranged to pass the days pleasantly in closer good-fellowship with rollicking companions. When Molly was gone, put away in the obliterating earth ; whilst the mystery of the corruption of the white body (that had lived so strenuously and laughed and wept and loved so fiercely itself and others only to end in the grave), whilst the why and the whence and the whither of it all roused the most profound emotions in the vibrant imagination of Betty, Noll had settled into a very merry and slovenly way of life ; and he kept up the untidy habit.

For Betty's entertainment he would occasionally forego some meeting of his boon companions, and show a boisterous rally of the old comradeship, as on Christmas Day, which was kept by them all in right jovial English fashion.

The whole crew of them dined at a students' restaurant, and everything was *à l'anglais*, a fact not in the least discounted by the strangeness of each dish to English eyes and palate. Indeed, the plum-pudding alone awakened the familiar recognition, for it had a piece of holly a-top, and Gaston Latour got enough delight out of setting on fire the encircling brandy in the dish to comfort him for the suppression of the hunting-horn by the police.

The generous humours of the occasion were only marred by a slightly too generous flow of wine ; the which had been of small moment in itself, had it not chanced that it loosed Noll's tongue, and he, growing somewhat garrulous under the ruddy excitement, and feeling compelled to shine, did not hesitate to give more than a sly cut at Betty in the midst of the railleries, crying out in mock defence of her that when she *did* finish her masterpiece it might make a noise in the world, *though it certainly took a long time in the making !* Betty became aware at a stroke that for months he

had been criticizing her, silently fretting at her industry. It were as if he had lashed at her with a whip. He could not leave it alone. He had another cut, a cheerfully ironic reference to Casauban's unfruitful pedantry in his *Key to All the Mythologies* that never came to anything but the threat of its promise, the work that the prig is always *going to do*—the jibe was intended as a veiled reference to Betty's careful workmanship, and to enhance the fact that he himself " knocked off " his successes with something of the facility of a great gift.

Betty's sensitive ear lost no slightest shade of the sneer amidst all the jovial manner ; it was not wasted upon her. It stung her to the quick. From any other mouth it would have passed her by, a dog's snap. It revealed to her in one ugly moment that all the work she had done to increase his ease for work, all her forbearing patience to his encroachment upon her own working hours, all her care to free his hands from drudgeries and release his wits to the full concentration on his career, all was already largely forgotten—worse, had been scarcely appreciated. And, somehow, the wild spirits of the evening failed to reach her ; she was in a daze, she had received a buffet full in the face from the hand from which she had least feared it. And it was the sign of her splendid selflessness that she was sickeningly struck with pity that he could be guilty of this meanness—she was filled with a strange bewildering shame, not because the blow had been delivered, not because it had struck her, but that it had come from the one in all the world who, more than any, fouled his hand in the act. She flinched from that punishment as from an abyss that yawned.

CHAPTER LXI

Wherein the Landlord of The Scarlet Jackass *is unable to sing his Song*

At the tavern of *The Scarlet Jackass* the hero of the evening was a young poet who had that day found a publisher. The wines and ale went round. Amidst uproar they were crowning the old mad poet Gattepoésie with a wreath of pure white roses, where he sat blinking and smiling in a chair upon a table, that he, having uttered a panegyric upon the new immortal, after the manner of the Academy, might conduct him to the chair and crown him; and it was in the midst of the resulting fooleries that Noll, nudging Horace Malahide, noticed the absence of André Joyeux—missing the flow of his rollicking wit and the effect of his commanding personality.

He signed to one of the waiters, an enormous stout man, chosen by André because he resembled Renan in his Academic uniform.

"Garçon," said he—"where is the master?"

He was resting—upstairs—in the room just over the tavern. He was only allowed to drink milk—he was in need of rest.

The young Englishmen said they would go up and see him, and the waiter leading the way, the two young fellows followed him up the private stair. At the door the waiter knocked, and left them. They entered.

On his bed lay André Joyeux, his face deathly pale, and a drawn look about the eyes.

He received the two young fellows affectionately, held Noll's hand, embraced Horace.

Noll found himself mute. But the sick man saw that he was affected, and patted him on the shoulder—it was only nerves, he said—it would pass—he would soon be giving them

> Proud as kings and loud as carters,
> Live they who live on the Hill of Martyrs

—they should have the rousing chorus——

The distant sound of laughter below checked him, and brought a frown to his knit brows.

He sank back on his pillows, shutting his eyes, wearily.

But the noise below fretted his ears, and the baffling bursts of laughter and applause kept his mind going, seeking the cause, restless, inquisitive.

Noll drew a chair beside his bed, he offered to come and look after him ; but André patted his hand, put his offer aside, laughed pathetically, said he would soon be all right—they should see—they would very soon again have

> Proud as kings and loud as carters,
> Live they who live on the Hill of Martyrs.

The sound of a song being sung below brought a questioning frown to the sick man's eyes again. Who was it playing ? What was the song ? He did not recognise it !

Noll asked if he might not send them all away—he would stop the noise.

" No, no," said André. " Let them sing their songs—it was Guitreau who had found a publisher—he had himself discovered Guitreau—it would be boorish to spoil his evening—no, no—let them sing their songs. We have only once to live——"

There was loud laughter. . . .

They had sat awhile in silence, when Noll asked if they could do nothing.

No ; he wanted for nothing. The waiters were good souls. Everyone had been kind. No. . . . He thought he would now sleep.

He embraced them, and they left the room—crept from it silently, some strange instinct and dread dictating their going a-tiptoe.

And as Noll turned to close the door, the wan-faced man in the gloom of the ill-lit room ran his hand wearily over his brow and flung his arm restlessly upon the coverlet.

CHAPTER LXII

Wherein a Comely Young Woman waits at a Window all Night, watching for Sir Tom Fool—listening for his Step

THE bleak night without was cold as God's contempt. The March wind shrieked shrilly about the court, swung up out of the resounding blackness, tugged at the shutters of windows, rattled at all loose things ill-naturedly, smote the walls in a huff, and tossed insolently out of the court again, shrilly screaming—leaving a gloomy sullen lull, full of dry-throated questionings.

A bride of a year—and anxious self-questionings !

Betty sat at the window, uneasy, watchful, ashamed. All evening had she come and gone, pacing out disturbing thoughts. Many nights had she thus watched, humiliated, alone—watching for Noll, listening for his footfall. Once the city clocks had struck midnight, the passing of each wheeled conveyance became a goad to her anxious hearing—a stab to her anxiety—an added sneer at the loss of her hold upon her lover's affections—a muffled insult to her attractiveness.

A year ago had been a wedding-day—this morning the youth had whistled out of the house wholly forgetful of it. A year ago this room had been a garden of flowers scattered from a wedding-bouquet—this night the room was wholly bare of flowers. A year ago had been wondrous tendernesses, and watchful care over her that had been a very burden of sweet attentions—eyes that hungered, ears that listened to her every whisper, hands that burnt into her white flesh, caresses that shamed her with delight—to-day was criticism, excusings of neglect, carelessnesses.

To-morrow, perchance, Youth would cease even to excuse itself.

A year ago had seen youth and maid climb lightheartedly to the harsh garret of the world's toil, full of high hopes and noble purpose, stepping it gleefully, clear-eyed, will and heart inflamed with the Certainties. To-day the very Certainties of yesterday were crumbling into ashen doubts.

She ate her heart out, silently, with womanhood's uncomplaining dignity ; yet was her soul riven by this fool's folly—his littlest harshnesses turning to bitterness in these long night-watches. His forgetfulnesses, his ignorings, his egotisms, his

irresolutions—how they all took shape and grew in bogey ugliness, indeed to something of their true scarecrow ugliness, as she brooded upon them, raising the nauseating dead out of the ashes of her experience !

Nay, so fatuous his conceit, he must needs even rob her of the dignity of her work, sneer at the child of her imagination, leave her nothing. But he had wasted bad manners. Genius is serene in the confidence of its mighty Patiences. Time waits upon the great Wills.

Then she would make excuses for him. Of a truth, he had had a little vogue—stood well with his fellows——

But he wrecked his own cause.

In a passing mood of conceit he had strutted it in the mock-modest manner, tapping his own chest, half ashamed to drag in so modest a fellow. But look at him—even him ! and the like ; and forthwith averred that he " knocked off " more in an hour sometimes than she in a month—the " knocking off " inferring fertility and facility of genius. The which, whatever it lacked in the courtesies, held at least some virtue of truth.

But Truth may walk abroad too naked.

Ah, Betty—and if thou, looking out of thy window, couldst but see with thy clear eyes across the lamp-lit city this Noll of thine !

CHAPTER LXIII

Wherein the Ceiling of the Tavern that is called The Scarlet Jackass *is stained with Blood*

Noll was at a gathering of little men—at a students' tavern on the heights of Montmartre. The praises of the mediocrities flushed him. His eyes were bright; he had glittered.

Ah, Noll; and there is one who watches for thee, sitting alone, her handsome head bowed by the midnight lamp to give thee welcome. She is thy one selfless friend—with brain whose verdict is worth all the splutterings of these bedraggled talents that sit about thy self-sufficient elbows! . . .

That was a rousing night at the tavern of *The Scarlet Jackass*. The room was choked with the wild rioting bohemians.

"Waiter!"

"Waiter!"

"Waiter!"

"Yes, sir—mon Dieu!—one minute—one minute."

The waiters rushed to and fro, perspiring, white aprons flying.

The glass went round.

So the place roared with laughter and riot and noisy good-fellowship and song.

As the crowd began to thin out, and the place emptied of all but the regular frequenters, the old mad poet, his chin sunk on his chest where he snored in a chair, his wreath of roses askew over his ear, roused and asked for André Joyeux—he regretted that he had not been there—he missed his waggeries.

At the mention of his name they called the head-waiter, who lay a-drouse in a corner. No, he had not seen the master since sundown. There had been no time to go and see him—but he had only to ring his bell should he have need of anything. He was sleeping, they trusted, content that his tavern was filled to overflowing—he had need of sleep—much sleep. Yes, yes; it had been a mad night indeed—a great night. Yes; the English gentlemen might go up and see the master if they would but go very quietly—yes, they might all go, if they would but go very quietly, in case he slept——

Noll and Horace stumbled up the dark stair that was but

half revealed in the smoky haze of the dusk that goes before the dawn. Opening the door stealthily, they looked in, and saw that amongst the other departing shadows that lingered there, a dead man lay stretched upon the floor, the scarlet brand of a bullet-wound on his pale brow. The red blood showed on the white skin, a waxen seal upon his last mysterious testament.

And as the others, befogged with the potations of their riot, entered the room, close-following at their heels, they solemnly took off their hats—the old mad poet last of all and with a mighty hiccup.

Yes, André Joyeux slept at last—and slept well. He would ring no more for sleeping-draughts. He had no more needs. His philosophies were at an end. In a loud burst of merriment that had echoed from below, he had taken his life, the pistol unheard in the frantic applause.

They lifted up the poor lifeless body and placed it upon the bed —the arms restless no longer now—the body still, in the strange silence of death.

An old bohemian stepped forward and looked down on the pallid peaceful face ; stooped and kissed the dead man upon the cheek. He stood and looked down upon him.

" He took me from beggary and starvation in a garret," said he. . . . " Ah, that was an artist ! And—he knew how to live. He——"

CHAPTER LXIV

Wherein the Angel of the Annunciation enters into a Garret

As the chill grey of an April dawn crept across her silent garret, sweeping the frayed shadow of the night aside to join other lurking shadows in gloomy corners, Betty, in white night-robe, was awakened and sat up in bed, all in a strange wonder and alarm.

With unuttered timorous questionings, with delicious fears, out of the void she heard the first whisper of the annunciation of her motherhood. As the sea-voice carols ghostly refrains of mystic adventures within the music-haunted chambers of a sea-shell, so, to the hollows of her subtle ears, came exquisite murmurings that to her ecstatic fancy held the quick rhythmic breathings that are the sleep of a little child ; and, of a sudden, her white body glowed and her dear breasts swelled at the dream-touch of infant-fingers —leaped to the greedy caress of infant lips. Her comely limbs shivered, fearful with a thousand fears ; her whole being flushed hot—she was dumb with bewildering muteness before the majesty of the mystery of a new life.

Her eyes filled with tears.

Across the murk of the stress of life that is the dust-storm upblown from the sordid details of living—across the dreary fog that is compact of the accumulations of vain strivings and failings and galling insolences—across the black clouds of the humiliations and the indignities that are flung along the path of womanhood under cover of the fulsome hypocrisies, there leaped, with rainbow brilliancy, the bright sign that gladness is the law, the night but the shadow of the light, that there is laughter in the firmament and gaiety and delight, and on the earth a splendid wayfaring.

She smiled through her tears.

She arose from her bed, and stood amazed. She saw visions.

The bare garret of her motherlessness swung away from beneath her exquisite feet, vanished in frantic vertigo from her ken. She put out dazed hands. And lo ! as her wounded feet, climbing upwards always, topped the hill of her pilgrimage—the clouds lifted—she stepped into the garden of her kingdom. She heard a call, and she answered the call—stood at last at the threshold of the innermost sanctuary of the most holy place in the magnificent palace

along life's journey—the room where the children play. There, where were little arms held out to her, little hands that clung to her skirts, she sank to her knees—her ears deliriously a-riot with the patter of small feet, the prattle of child's gossip, the laughter of the little gladsome ones. Her eyes were large with the vision of the coming years—bruises and small troubles and still smaller wounds she saw brought to her knees with childlike confidence in the certainty of balm.

She sobbed, and sank upon the bed.

Ay, thou winsome one; yet even here may be wrought scars also in thy heart. Ah, thou most happy thou, to have a heart that may be thus scarred!

When womanhood, filled with such fearful ecstasies, quickened with the mystery of a new life, alarmed with chill dreads, yet pulsing to the rhythm of an added glory, realizes her lover as greater than lover—it is at this time of all times that he should be at her side. But Noll was taken up with trivial things; so trivial that he thought them serious—so far had he lost the focus of noble vision.

The garret was possessed with the gloomy announcement of a drizzling new day when Noll opened the door and entered.

Betty, crouching on her bed, held out her arms to him:

"Noll," she began, tears in her eyes——

Noll went to her, caressed her, and sat himself down on the side of the bed.

He yawned.

He was very tired.

"Betty," said he, heedless of the eagerness in her voice, deaf to the strange thrill in her being, his eyes on his own amusements, his thoughts on his own fatigue; "Betty, I am dog-weary—I have to be off again at six—I must snatch a couple of hours sleep." He flung into an arm-chair, dressed as he was. "You might give me a rouse at six——"

He yawned again and was silent.

"Noll," she said shyly—"I have felt so strange—whilst—whilst you were away—during the night. And just as the dawn was breaking I——"

Noll moved uneasily in his chair:

"Ah, yes, Betty, dear heart," said he drowsily, a suspicion of compunction stirring within his gadding conscience that this girl had been too much alone of late. He misunderstood her delicacy. His conceit jumped to the uneasy conclusion that she was blaming him. "You see, the whole of the last few days our fellows have been toiling day and night at our car for the procession at the Bal des Quatz Arts; but it—is—finished. To-day has come at last—to-day we hold—the—orgy—of youth—to-night is the Bal des Quatz Arts. . . . After to-night, sweetheart, I shall be able to get home earlier. . . . I am afraid—I haven't—done—my duty by you—of late. . . ." He roused for a moment. "By George, our studio is going to win the laurels at the students' ball

this evening—we have been at it all night, putting the last touches to our great plaster statue of the Goddess of War—a huge copy of Gérôme's Bellona—looks terrific—one of our fellows has done a splendid frieze for the gilt chariot that is to bear her majesty—we finished her toilette—at daybreak. And now I feel like a lady's-maid to a woman of fashion, waiting up all night to—take off the garments—of—victory."

He yawned. His eyes closed :

" But—oh—ah—I must stop cackling indifferent prose. . . . The massier of our studio wants us all back at six. . . . We have to get Bellona to the Moulin Rouge for this evening's show, and she has a heavy tread—as becomes the goddess of War. We are going to—drag her—across Paris with—ropes—up to Montmartre. . . . It will be—a rollicking—march. . . . Our lot at Gérôme's studio—always begin early—and—stay—late." He yawned heavily " Hi-yo-ho ! . . . Yes—it will be a—rollicking——"

He relapsed into a drowse.

He started up for a moment :

" Half a hundred French students make—an—ex'lent—flea—in th' ear—of—Paris. . . . An—ex'lent—flea——"

Silence took possession of the room.

" Noll——"

Noll roused :

" Oh, yes—let me see—where were we ?"

He laughed embarrassedly :

" Oh, yes—we're to march her across Paris to the tune of the Marseillaise. . . . We've been practising the Marseillaise all night, Gaston Latour's hunting-horn going full blare. We've been raising the ghosts—I can—promise you. . . . It's a strange—thing—how few patriots know the words of—their own—national anthem ! However—tra-la-la, sung loud enough—goes a long way—to—express a patriot's parochial emotion. An—extra—ordinary—long—way——"

He mumbled into a drowse.

Betty made a last effort to tell him, before he should relapse into sleep :

" Such a strange thing has happened—to me—Noll," she said.

" Y-e-s ?" drawled he, missing the shy hint.

There was a long silence.

His heavy breathing told that he slept.

For two weary hours, Betty sat up in bed lest sleep should overcome her, and Noll miss his rouse. And brooding there, her chin on her knees, her sorry vigil dragged through the laggard minutes.

As the clocks struck six across the city's roofs, she crept out of bed and roused Noll ; and he, after much rousing, got up, vague-eyed and wit-wandering, embraced her, and, searching for his hat, put it on and lurched out of the room in a drowsy daze.

Betty reeled from the cruelty—stumbled—and was overwhelmed with sickness.

CHAPTER LXV

Wherein Betty walks into the Desert

Betty was dressed for a journey.

On the floor, near the table whereat she sat writing a letter, lay a battered old black trunk, strapped and labelled.

The day was chilly grey without.

As she blotted the last lines, there came to her hearing, from the thoroughfares of the Latin Quarter below, rollicking snatches of song, and the stir of students in noisy holiday mood.

Betty brushed aside her tears, and read carefully the letter she had just signed :

"Noll,

A year ago I was writing you love-letters—delightful deliriousness more full of meaning than of sense. To-day I am writing farewell.

It is the most eager desire of my life, of my whole being, that you should be free—to be a man. I came to you, joined my life to yours, that you should be free to realize yourself, most wholly free—in body, in intellect, and in conscience. I now take back my life from yours, that, having failed with me to achieve freedom for yourself or for me, you shall be free to become free—or as near free as you may be.

Your life is become full of little secrecies—of half-told tales —of timid reservations—of pompously withheld mysteries—of little excuses. I can only live, for close companionship, with a man ; and a man shall not fear himself—nor another.

You must live free from the need to hide yourself from me. Therefore, to give you back to yourself I withdraw myself.

No man that is master of himself would live with a woman who is not also free—the free associate only with the free—they do not consort with curs, whether men or women. It is fools' cant that speaks of the woman *obeying* the man—such a man were only fit to be the father of a slave people.

And more—the woman in marriage must be free to live her nobility.

I am not of those puling women who, when they are flung aside or suffer rebuff, cling to the arm of him who strikes the blow

—who whimper and cringe and are content to be content if they but have occasional consideration. Least of all am I of those women who, being stung with a man's neglect and jibe and injustice, walk through a haggard existence by the man's shrinking side, keeping his allegiance by the dread of her crying out upon him to the neighbours, driving him with scowl or invective along a narrow path where his unwilling feet are kept from straying only through fear for his petty dignities—making him a slave to his weaknesses and hers, and herself a hissing whip and a shame. Such women are of the slave-peoples—they mother a race of weaklings. For fear is as much through the mother as the father.

But, you will say, 'Let us explain, let us make it up and kiss and be friends, let us bury the past.' So indeed we might sit by the wayside of life and babble threadbare platitudes to hide our losses. Would that be music in our ears? Would it be gain? Even if you hoodwinked me with pathetic promises of duty and the like, is our strength increased?

The conventions of the world might be satisfied by my meekly bowing my head and walking primly by your side. But the past is immortal, and rises again from the dead. We might take our walks abroad together, but we should no longer go hand in hand —a ghost strides between. He smells of the dead most unconscionably, this fawning spectre of little diplomacies. Pah! how I detest the cringing flunkey that speaks in apologies!

You would not have me walk along a way of frequent reconciliations—each reconciliation a humiliation—each humiliation making that uneasy ghost that stalks between us into a more tangible figure of Hate. Reconciliations! of what? for what? You do not think me so little free that I would stoop to call for explanations—explanations that but explain why explanations should not be.

What have you or I to do with the conventions of the world, when all's said? We are not the hirelings of the world. Are you and I the timid servants of the gossips?

Life is an affirmation—a great Thou Shalt—not an enfeebling incubus of belittling Thou Shalt Nots.

Love, like friendship, will not suffer catechism—does not rest on commandments—does not increase through rebuff.

Life is not a bundle of apologies—how much less then is Love, which is of the essence of Life! Love is a splendid comrade—not an excuse for small disdains.

I have given you all my love. I have not bartered it. I do not haggle over its value. Nor for my part would I hedge you about with restrictions, nor win your smiles on conditions—for willing comradeship sunk to dutiful loyalty is become a restriction. I ask for no paper treaties. I will fling you no Thou Shalt Nots. The written promise is the least part of a strong man's honour.

If a man or woman, or the shabby travesties of these, would find delight in adulteries, will the written bond or public proclamation of fidelity prevent their secret treacheries?

I can no more stoop to jealousy of the world than of another

woman, even if I were possessed of the mean insanity of jealousy, which is but a part of the village-idiot's wits who sits in the winter and thinks to blow dead ashes into living fire if his rude breath be but harsh enough.

Nor can I, on the other hand, live in your house as 'one of three.' If you and I and Apology essayed to live together, it could not last. I cannot embrace Apology with effusion; and I cannot brook to see you yield yourself to shabby excuses. I am not sure that I would not rather have you committing mean sins with a dairymaid.

The pain with which my hand writes these lines it would be wanton cruelty to inflict upon you, Noll; yet I will tell you that since I collected a few belongings together into my poor weather-beaten trunk—indeed, I have never before realized how shabby a dowry I brought to you, dear heart (I have scarred the dear walls with as little brigandage as I might, so that they shall stare upon you with no eyeless sockets and be the less lonely home for you when I am gone)—since I have taken a last look round the rooms where I have known the best days of my life, as I sit waiting for the vehicle which is to take me out into the desert again, I find it hard to keep back the tears from blotting out my handwriting. Scalding tears, Noll; yet I have wept tears also that did not scald, happy tears—indeed, I have but this moment kissed the pillows of our marriage-bed. . . .

But there are wheels that stop outside the courtyard gate. Just one more round of our old home amidst the stars, to touch the dear surrounding things I have loved so well—*we* have loved so well—and I am gone.

BETTY.

P.S.—Ah, Noll; there are no flowers upon the balcony now! Not even a little one to take in remembrance that the balcony was once a garden."

There was a rustle of skirts on the landing without—a knock at the door.

Betty uttered no sound. She thrust the letter into an envelope and sealed it.

There was another knock, and a panting voice cried from without:

"It is I, madame—Madelaine."

Betty went to the door and opened it.

"Ah, Madelaine—you are back!"

Madelaine, daintily dressed, and her slim being looking charming and refined, entered the room and shut the door.

"Madelaine!" exclaimed Betty, "what a pretty frock!"

"Ah, madame—I go to a dressmaker's by day now—the old miser is content to have me work for her at night." She shrugged her slender shoulders. "It saves her my meals."

She had not become a dressmaker for nothing. Every stitch and flounce told, bringing out the beauty and lithe grace of the girl.

She was panting :

" Yes, madame. But—mon Dieu, you are of a surety amongst the stars here !" Her pretty scarlet lips smiled. " Amongst the stars—as the angels always are. But—ah, yes—I went and put on decent clothes and took your letter to Mademoiselle Babette, madame ; but she was out—she is preparing for the Bal des Quatz Arts to-night—has gone out with Monsieur Horace and the others. . . . Mon Dieu, yes ; you live amongst the stars, madame."

" Madelaine, have you kept the carriage waiting ?"

" Yes, madame—it is below."

Betty arose wearily from her seat :

" Will you help me to carry down my trunk ?"

Madelaine looked at her sharply :

" Mon Dieu, no, madame," said she. " *I* will carry it. No—Hodendouche shall carry it—he grows fat. Yes, madame ; do not interfere with me—I will call him——"

She skipped out on to the landing with swift light step, and hailed Hodendouche from below.

She came back, her lips parted with the exertion.

" Madelaine," said Betty—" will you come to the station and see me off ?"

" Mon Dieu, yes, madame. I would have gone if I had walked —in tight new shoes."

Betty laughed sadly. She went to her and put her hands on the girl's shoulders. She held her off at arm's length. There was a lovely glow on the girl's beautiful dark Southern face.

" Madelaine, you are all a-tremor ! What has happened ?"

Madelaine laughed gaily :

" Ah, madame ; it was intoxicating," she said. She hesitated —almost shyly for Madelaine. " When I drove through the streets—in the carriage—it was splendid. . . . All the world thought I was some man's mistress——"

" Oh, Madelaine !"

" Come, madame," said Madelaine—" here's Hodendouche."

Hodendouche entered the room with a set smile, and took off his cap.

Madelaine turned to him :

" Ah, Hodendouche," said she—" what a climb to reach the stars ! . . . But now you are here, pick up that box and take it downstairs ; Madame will follow us in a minute."

As the grunting Hodendouche shouldered the trunk, and, followed by Madelaine, left the room, Betty went to the bed and put the letter upon the white coverlet ; and for awhile she lingered there.

She sat down on the side of the bed.

Ah, youth's couch ! what limitless imaginings hath thy pillow known ! what vasty ambitions have burnt out upon thee ! what schemings and plannings for the payments of the bare needs of life ! Tears thou hast known, and sighs—but the stars glittered ever in the firmament even when it was darkest ; and at every rebuff Resolution reborn put out wounded hands to the heights.

What hath he known of youth who peered through eyes so dullard that they saw but the dingy finger-marks upon the stairways to the attics of the palaces in the bohemia of his teens ?

Who so weak of spirit that disdained to climb the stairs to the topmost garrets when the need was ! For did we not sit there under the roof, expectant amidst the splendid galaxies whilst the workaday world did blink its myriad utilitarian street-lamps at our feet !

Ah, those gipsy days of our wander-years, when we strolled, careless of the infinities, along the blithe alleys of our youthful wayfarings, and every garret was the topmost chamber of a palace, and the rough bed but an excuse for splendid dreams !

Betty stooped and kissed the pillow where Noll would sleep.

She let herself out of the room, shut the door softly, and hurriedly followed the others down the stairs. . . .

The fat little concierge, as she bent over her morning coffee-making in her dark little den by the gateway, was startled by a vision which appeared to her, kissed her rough old cheek, slipped a gold piece into her hand, ran out to a carriage, and was gone.

CHAPTER LXVI

Which has to do with the Great Orgy of Youth

"SUZANNE !"

The shout rang through the great hall of the Moulin Rouge ; and the vast crowd of dancing revellers, dressed in fancy dress, stopped their dancing and crowded towards the wide-flung doors that gave entrance from the gardens.

The leader of the orchestra hurried the jigging mazurka to an end, and, with blare of the crashing chords that in music stand for finality, ceased playing the dance-music. He tapped for silence amongst the ranks of the musicians and held out hushing hands. He stood up, turned and glanced at the great tribune of the twelve judges, saw that, arrayed in their splendid robes, they had taken their seats ; saw, too, that the gorgeous stream of colour and glittering armour was moving in mass of revellers towards the great doors of the garden entrance :

" The cavalcade !" he grunted.

There was a fluttering of white sheets of paper. Settling himself in his seat, he tapped for attention, swung his baton, and with resulting crash the orchestra burst into the thundering music of a triumphal march.

" Suzanne !"

The shout went up from the hoarse throats of a thousand fantastically-robed students, sounding vibrant in the golden haze and echoing in the blaze of light to the resounding rafters. They drew their swords, Greek and Roman, and they of the courts of the Louis, Crusader and Saracen, and Goth and barbarian ; the flashing steel greeted her :

" Suzanne !"

Upon a golden shield, supported high above all heads by four of the most famous models of Paris, she came, her white body statuesque and calm; gleaming rosy-tinted, she stood poised in all her slender beauty—and as the shout went up she smiled.

" Suzanne !"

She knew it well. She was in all the beauty of youth—and her perfect body not only held the glory of the ancient art of the sculpture of Greece, but it had the exquisite mystery of life in its pleasant surface which the art of man cannot utter.

So Suzanne led the procession round the huge hall and was borne towards the tribune where the judges sat.

After the queen of the models came the procession of the rival studios. From amidst the crested helms and glittering steel of Greek and Roman soldiery arose the great figure of the war-goddess Bellona, the fury standing a-tiptoe, sword and shield upraised, head thrust forward snake-like, her scarlet mouth shrieking at topmost pitch the fierce yell to war, her black brows gathered in black hate ; before her feet an angry snake, with head upraised, darted a black sullen tongue. As the great travesty of Gérôme's awful figure of the lust of blood moved along, there shone from out the hollows of her staring eyes a pale green light, cruel and livid. On her gilt chariot she passed, escorted by her bodyguard of Greek and Roman soldiery, and gave place to the classic float on which sat the nude young model, Marcelle, posed as Gérôme's exquisite statue of Tanagra. Marcelle's slight and slender girlish figure at this time made her a serious rival to Suzanne, and was markedly affecting the whole ideal of womanly beauty and proportion throughout the studios of France. As she sat, in all the simplicity of pose of a Tanagra figure, the light making her delicate colour glow, the cry of hoarse admiration for Bellona changed to a shout for

" Tanagra !"

And shout of Tanagra gave way to

" Marcelle !"

The swords flashed.

Gérôme's students passed, giving place to other schools, each in its pageant striving to express the ideals of the art which inspired its chosen master. The rude groups of the barbaric men who wore but the shaggy skins of animals ; the wild groups of Merovingian and Carlovingian Franks ; the dandified figures of the bewigged and heavy-booted court of the great Louis ; the powdered and patched and silken-habited gentlemen of the last Louis ; the large-lapelled, long-tail-coated and high-stocked dandies of the Revolution : they all passed with their triumphal cars, and drew the loud acclamations of the boisterous revellers.

The splendid procession circled round the great hall, passed the tribune of the judges to the thrash of the martial music; round and round again. But amidst the frantic din it was soon known that Gérôme's students had won the honours of the night.

As the gladiators and warriors passed the judges' tribune the last time before the procession broke up to join the revellers, the twelve judges stood up in solemn silence, and saluted the goddess of war and the exquisite figure of the young woman who sat in all the triumph of her beauty.

They stood whilst Gérôme's students passed. And as they so stood in strange dignity, the emblems of imperial Rome above them, the battle-axes bound in faggots, and the motto *Death to Tyrants* emblazoned between, as they so stood beneath the row of heads that dripped the blood of the dead tyrants, there floated across the ages some whisper of the eternal struggle of life, of the

survival of the fittest, and of the crowning mystery of the incarnation of man through the beauty of woman. . . .

As the clocks struck three, there was a rush of revellers towards the procession of waiters who appeared in white aprons carrying chairs and tables and plates and glasses.

In a trice the place was a great banqueting-hall, white with the napery of a hundred tables.

The students collected about the boards of their different studios, thundering for supper with fist-banged poundings upon the tables, and the singing of songs ; which gave way to a roar of applause when the army of waiters reappeared laden with wine and the dishes of the feast. And as they ran backwards and forwards, their white aprons flying, there was the clink of glass amid the babel of a thousand tongues, and the clatter and roar of merrymaking.

When Gérôme's students arose from their table in a body, and the company of gladiators and Greek and Roman soldiery moved in an orderly array towards the judges' tribune, they were greeted with thunders of applause, which burst out again on their return, laden with the prize of victory, bottles of wine.

They swept round to their tables ; and, opening their ranks, took possession of their seats. The massier rapped upon the table, and called for silence.

Standing before them, statuesque in a splendid girdle with the embroidered cloth hanging therefrom before and behind, stood Suzanne, jewels glittering in her ruddy hair.

They all stood up and greeted her with a shout.

The massier filled a glass :

" To the queen—the victors !" he cried.

They all drank to her.

As they sat down, she leaped lightly upon the table ; stooped down ; took up a bottle of champagne in each hand, and flinging wide the amber wine for baptism of victory over the encircling students, she threw the empty bottle from her. She laughed with mischievous glee, sent the glass and china flying with sandaled foot, to clear a space upon the table, and, raising the bottle, bathed her bare shoulders in the foaming wine before the assembled company.

There was a call for a dance—and the orchestra striking up the quaint pulsing music of a Moorish measure, Suzanne, her feet stepping it upon the snow-white tablecloth, swung her graceful way through a strange haunting dance of Arabia.

With slow step and dainty feet that never hurried, the beautiful young woman strutted, in pride of her body's perfection, upon the white carpet of the tablecloth.

In the shout of applause that greeted her, she skipped deftly from the table, flung herself upon Noll's knees, held up his face, kissed him, and with " Thou handsome Englishman !" she laughed, put him gaily from her, proudly went her way, and was lost in the tumultuous throng.

Noll laughed embarrassedly.

She had set the fashion ; on to the tables leaped a score of models, in fancy dress, and danced among the glasses ; the great revel proceeding with riot and feasting and boisterous merriment.

In the midst of the whirlwind moved Gaston Latour, disguised in his usual affectation of lugubrious and melancholy seriousness. He went arrayed as Midnight Alarms—for trousers he wore a white shirt, his legs solemnly thrust through the sleeves, the cuffs fastened about his ankles with enormous brooches for gaudy sleeve-links, enormous naked indiarubber feet strapped on for boots. This symbolism of hurried midnight dressing was further insisted upon by the lady's stays that bound the shirt's tails about his waist, his shoulders bare, save for the great hunting-horn over his chest, and a fireman's bucket strapped to the top of his head. The pretty little model who was with him, dressed solely in a pair of shoes and Gaston's corduroy trousers, the braces holding them up, strapped over her white shoulders, replenished this bucket on his head during the evening with heel-taps from the wine-glasses, so that whilst talking confidentially to anyone, Gaston gradually lowered his head until the liquor splashed down upon their faces and trickled down the front of them—a result greeted by Gaston with a loud triumphant blare on the horn.

Gérôme's students had drawn their tables into a semicircle ; and before the centre table, where the massier sat, were two young Frenchmen in the armour of Roman lictors ; they were holding up Ponsonby Wattles Ffolliott under the armpits, whilst he, dressed as Narcissus, with a bath towel strapped round his loins, and daffodils in his hair, was drunkenly attempting to make a speech.

He showed signs of going to sleep, spite of the occasional shaking up by the lictors ; so, amidst loud laughter, they all held out their hands, thumbs down, and Gaston Latour advancing from his seat with a soup-tureen, poured a libation of soup over his hair, and as it trickled down his stupid pallid features, clapped the tureen on his head ; the lictors carried him away and laid him upon the floor amongst a heap of black bottles, where he settled to uneasy rest, and mumbled into sleep. . . .

Noll, his strong clean-cut features and his virile youth enhanced by the severe lines of the Roman helmet with its great framing steel cheek-pieces, and his well-set body and his shins glittering in the steel breast-plate and greaves of a classic warrior, sat at the outermost table of the semicircle. Beside him sat Madelaine, her white shoulders gleaming as she nestled close to him in the low-bodiced grey silk dress with great hooped skirt of Velasquez's infantas. Babette, who sat at her other hand, had seized upon her early in the evening (taking her away without ceremony from Ffolliott, who was even then in a fuddled state from wine-bibbing), and Babette had sternly kept the girl by her side throughout the resulting riot. Indeed, the girl had not needed much compulsion, for she clung to Babette anxiously, and a

little frightened. She was intoxicated with the whirl of her first ball ; and she was very weary of Ffolliott. She was a little excited with wine, to which she was not accustomed. She was a little alarmed about Ffolliott—she had been flattered by his attention and proud of having caught his eyes a few days before ; she had been thrilled at the prospect of the gown and still more by the gift of the silken stuff for its making—and, when she had stood in it before the mirror, she had realized her wondrous beauty, which it seemed to have suddenly enhanced and brought to view.

Noll touched her hand :

"Madelaine," said he—"who gave you that dress ?"

"That beast !"

She pointed to the drunken figure of Ffolliott, where he slumbered amongst the bottles. "He shall have it back to-morrow—I hate him," she said passionately ; and she leaned against Noll and nestled close to him.

Babette leant over her and whispered to Noll :

"Leave her so. When the procession forms to start for the march to the Latin Quarter, I will take her with me," she said. And she added gently : "I will watch over her as Betty has watched over me."

She sighed sadly, and putting her elbow on the table and her chin in the pink palm of her hand, she got a-brooding.

Horace Malahide, in the midst of laughter that greeted a sally of Gaston Latour's, turned to her. He leaned over to her, and looked into her eyes :

"Babette ! serious ! and here !"

A tear fell, and she let it fall unheeding.

Horace put his arm about her slender shoulders :

"What, Babette ! Has Noll been preaching a sermon ?"

She smiled sadly, stroked his cheek, and, drawing down his face to her, she kissed him. He looked such a splendid sunny fellow in his Roman armour :

"No, dear heart," she whispered—"I, Babette, have been preaching the sermon."

Horace laughed. . . .

Thus they feasted, danced, and sang until the golden yellow lights of the great hall paled and became but flickering ghosts of flame as the sapphire shadow of the night passed away in blue and purple and lilac before the white dawn. But the students danced on into the daylight. . . .

At last the musicians came down to the floor, and bursting into a triumphant march, the vast crowd of revellers formed into procession, and streamed out after the music into the fresh air of the early morning.

In the streets the early concierges that stood yawning at their gates, stopped their clacking tongues, cut short their scandals, and gaped at the din ; the street-sweepers rested from their sordid calling ; rag-pickers from their grimy traffic amongst the dust-bins—for an invading army, gorgeously apparelled, was taking

possession of Paris, swarming down her thoroughfares in triumphal splendour, and Bellona, goddess of war, thundered and rattled and swayed behind, dragged at the tail of the frantic riot. Street after street, the sleepy city awoke uneasily and put drowsy heads out of window, vaguely fearful of catastrophe and dread that the devil of revolution had taken possession of the place.

As the stream of revellers poured down the heights, they seized all cabs, and putting their helmets on the heads of the protesting coachmen, Greek warriors danced wildly on the tops of the cabs, adding the rattle of wheels and the cracking of whips to the din.

With shout and yell they captured a number of great drays laden with stone, and pulling down the drivers from their seats and dispossessing the teamsters, Roman charioteers took the reins and sent the great horses trotting and pounding clumsily along at the tail of the gay procession, adding the thunder of their passage to the tumult.

With song and yell and laughter and skylarking and jovial horseplay, they burst upon the great square of the Opera, swarmed up the broad steps, and setting the band in their midst, they took hands and danced in a mighty circle round and round the place. . . .

They got moving again, in gorgeous procession, and headed towards the Louvre, singing student songs, and cheering.

Gaston Latour curdled the blood of passing cabmen by running out into the road and letting the wheels run over his great india-rubber feet whilst he yelled in simulated agony. He then threw himself upon the breast of policemen, and wept bitterly over their shoulders—whilst he chalked innuendos across their backs.

With colours flying, band playing, and gorgeous battle-standards swaying on high, with glint of spears and gleam of armour, the noisy throng passed through the arches of the old-world palace of the Louvre and surged into the courtyard, bringing back for awhile some hint of its ancient magnificence.

The sun arose out of the morning over the edge of the city, painting with golden glory her heights and upper places, and the great towers of Notre Dame blushed in his dazzling magnificence, as, with song and shout and laughter, the youths crossed the river into the Latin Quarter ; and the old quays rang to their merriment as it has echoed for generations to the familiar riot and reckless feet of the studentry of this most illustrious university of the world.

Up the narrow way of the road that is called Buonaparte the resounding clamour went, until the great gates of the schools of the Beaux Arts opened and swallowed the gay procession that trooped into its court—the gates swung together with a loud clang, and the orgy spent itself within the staid precincts of the old courtyard that is set about on its several sides with classic columns and the faded stateliness of ancient palaces.

Noll halted outside the gates, saw them shut, and took his way

homewards to his high garret; and, as he went, his dress of a Roman soldier, that had been so appropriate a part of the night's frolic, suddenly became incongruous and ridiculous; and the cold clear morning's light brought a shrewd suspicion that of late he had been at best somewhat of a tomfool. He mounted the steps to his garret weary of all this riot—and there came upon him a sense of loneliness.

Ay, Noll, to what end has been all this frantic skipping?

Ah, youth! that ever plays the gadabout amidst the strenuous tomfooleries, with eager chasing of the wild-goose, whilst through lavish wanton fingers slip unrealized the essential things of life! Even so did the young Adam, as gossips say, toss away the title-deeds of Paradise that he might but take a bite at an untried apple.

CHAPTER LXVII

Wherein Youth finds the Cap and Bells to be but a Bizarre Crown

As Noll shut himself in, he felt a little injured that Betty was not home to greet him. He saw her letter lying on the pillow.

He flung himself upon his bed, drew a rug over him, and slept until nightfall. . . .

When he awoke, heavy and stiff and chill and bewildered, he put out his feet into the darkness, and sat for awhile on the side of the bed, whilst his drowsy brain cleared from the fog of sleep.

He felt somewhat ridiculous in the dress of a Roman soldier.

He shivered. He felt miserable—he was overwhelmed with a sense of loneliness. He wondered where Betty was—and what doing.

"Betty!" he called.

No answering sound. There was a ghostly stillness.

He vaguely remembered seeing a letter lying on the bed when he had lain down to sleep. He put out his hand, and his fingers struck the envelope. He opened the letter languidly and tried to read, but the light was gone. He arose stiffly and took it to the window, but the darkness wholly baffled him.

He searched about for a light, and only found a box of matches with difficulty. When he had struck the match he realized that the girl's care for him was lacking—that it had never before been lacking—there was no candle or lamp set out for him.

He felt sorry for himself, neglected, aggrieved. . . .

He went back to the bed, sat down upon it, and struck a match; and by the light of that match he read the opening lines of the letter. He struck match after match, and by their light he read to the end of it. And as his hot eyes took in the last words some of his old dignity came back to him—he saw that he was sitting in a tomfool's masquerading rags reading the generous deed of gift of one who refused to be a clog upon him to whom she had intended only to be an honour and a delight, who asked nothing of him, who made no complaint, who simply wished that he should be free, who would not even embarrass him with the initiative of her dismissal—who was gone!

And in the darkness he seemed to feel cold hands grope towards him and clasp icy fingers about his feet; and a whisper spoke in his ear: "Thou art alone."

CHAPTER LXVIII

Wherein it is seen that a Man is More or Less Responsible for his Father

Noll, arriving on Horace's landing, found Babette outside the door ; and she was sobbing.

" What ! Babette ?" said he—" and crying ?"

Babette brushed her fingers across her eyes :

" No," she said ; her trembling lips giving her the lie.

" Babette, why ?"

He put his hand on her shoulder kindly.

Babette stamped her foot :

" I am *not* crying," she said ; and a large tear fell. . . . She made an effort and said : " Horace is going home. . . . He is going—away."

She opened the door, and they went in together.

Noll walked into the studio ; but the silken rustle of Babette's skirts passed the door, and hurried on into the darkness of the house.

In the deep dusk of the studio sat four or five figures, smudgy dark shadows, sprawling in arm-chairs.

" Is that you, Noll ?" cried Horace from behind the red spark where a cigarette glowed.

" Yes—I thought you were alone——"

" Did you want me ?"

" There's no hurry, old boy," said Noll, and added grimly : " It can wait."

" That's right," said Horace, pushing a chair towards him with his foot. " There's the bottle by you—and a glass—and the dried cabbage of Egypt. Set it ablaze and talk."

Horace struck a match on the seat of his breeches as Noll flung into the chair, and handed the flame to him ; and Noll, setting the light to a cigarette, saw the faces of Bartholomew Doome and four of the Five Foolish Virgins in the gloom.

The light went out.

" Your room's all dismantled, Horace," said he.

" Yes," said Horace—" I'm off home. I was just sending

Jonkin with a note to tell you. I'm giving my farewell feast of departure to-morrow night—next day I'm off."

"Why ?"

Horace shifted uneasily in his chair ; and then he laughed.

"My father's become chairman of his newspaper company ; and he's going to give an address to a learned society on the Dignity of Literature. . . . I can't stand that. . . . After all, one is more or less responsible for one's father. . . . Indeed, the drawback of having a father is that he has the right to bear the same name."

"But——"

"Oh, yes, Noll—I know. They call him the Napoleon of the Press in the newspapers. In his own newspapers . . . yes," said Horace drily ; and added judicially, making every allowance for the defendant : "Of course, the old gentleman *may* be the Napoleon of the Press—perhaps he is. I don't see why I should wrangle about that. And I'm bound to say that, since they called him so, he has shaved off his city whiskers and keeps his hand thrust into the breast of his frock-coat, and pretends to think a lot, and isn't so beastly familiar with millionaires. He wanted to wear a grey overcoat last winter, but I had to draw the line. You see, the old man has no flare for the subtleties."

Doome coughed in the darkness :

"How did you break it to him, Horace ?" he asked drily.

Horace pshawed :

"I told him he couldn't do it—he'd be getting into a damned black cocked hat next," he sighed heavily : "I hate to be rude to my father," he said—"it always hurts me more than it does him."

There was a long silence.

"I don't think, Horace," said Noll, "that you make allowances for your father."

"Well, there's something in that,"' said Horace. "However, we'll allow that the old gentleman is the Napoleon of the Press. And of course he and the mother are in the thick of life. Indeed, the mother's gowns are always described in the morning paper after a big social function—and, by St. Paquin, it's extraordinary how well they sound in *print ;* yet—I don't know how it is—for she is a comely woman—but when you put a gold ornament upon my mother it looks like brass—she's one of those women who, when she hangs diamonds round her neck, looks like a ball-room chandelier. She's as sound as the apostles beneath her stays, but she has about as much taste as a housemaid—or the House of Brunswick. Then, the old gentleman dines with old Lord Bardolph Nankhill—sits at meat with Cabinet Ministers—and has been seen at Marlborough House. All that, of course, cannot do him any real harm. But—the Dignity of Literature ! and to a learned society ! No . . . it can't be done."

"Why ?" asked Doome. "Society accepts the words of an associate of Cabinet Ministers in a Tory Government as revelation sent direct from God."

"Why ?" scoffed Horace. "If learned societies want hints

about the commercialism of the Press, the traffic in brains, then pa's the man of whom to ask advice—but the Dignity of Letters ! Good God ! . . . An English newspaper should look like a gentleman's property. The *Times* is a journal that ought to be in every gentleman's waste-paper basket. It's always wrong—but it is magnificently wrong. It is consistent. To vote at the polls on the advice of the *Times* is almost to make a virtue of vice. To vote against it is to come near to statesmanship and is the first principle of political honour. But this newspaper of the father's is sometimes right, only in such bad taste. He has taken the whole look of distinction from the daily broadsheet. . . . He has vulgarized the printed page. The very print cries out against him. He has debased the manners of journalism until they are as coarse as the traffic in manures, as ignoble as money-lending, as truthful as a company-promoter's prospectus, as ponderous in wit and humour as an American advertisement, its political, artistic, social and all other ideals as high as the imagination of shop-walkers. He has even vulgarized the word Empire. The people whom he employs but scrape a living, and they therefore give of their worst—the consequence is the employment of illiterate and unscrupulous cads in what ought to be one of the noblest and most accomplished and most sacred of callings, the enlightenment of the nation. . . . Tshah ! in his hands the magazine has become a thing of shame—filled with illustrations that are a public misfortune. . . . No. My father is a millionaire. He has grown rich—that is all. Pa is a very good fellow ; but he don't know anything about the Dignity of Letters. I must go home. This thing cannot be done—it cannot be done."

Noll, finding Horace taken up with his own affairs, felt shy of telling him his trouble ; and it was borne in upon him sadly enough that his friend was leaving him, and had to be about his own business—far away from him at the very time he most wanted his sympathy. An overwhelming sense of loneliness came upon him, and the silence was profound.

The melancholy sense of coming departure—of the breaking up of old pleasant associations, of the passing out from their midst of a congenial and blithe companion and a happy face—set them all brooding.

It was abundantly clear that Horace Malahide was being packed ; for the valet, who had always before been hidden, though never far away, could now be heard in the next room brushing clothes and buzzing at the business.

" Oh," said Horace, rousing—" by the way, you fellows will want mourning for my feast of departure to-morrow !"

He turned towards the door beneath which gleamed a yellow streak of candle-light :

" Jonkin !" he called.

The door opened, and in the golden glory of the doorway stood the ineffable Jonkin. He was dressed like a student, short black coat, big black tie, velvet waistcoat, corduroy trousers and all ; but the dignity of the gentleman's gentleman glowed within.

"Yessir!" said he.

"Bring those boxes of black kid gloves, black neckties, and the crape for these gentlemen to choose from," said Horace.

"Yessir!" said Jonkin.

He brought the cardboard boxes with stealthy walk, and handed them about.

"Jonkin," said Horace—"is everything packed?"

"The serious baggage is all ready, sir," said Jonkin.

"I want you to take it all away the very first thing in the morning, and get it out of sight and off to London before the men arrive to drape the room."

"Yessir."

"Not a thing about the place here after to-morrow morning but what will go into my oldest and most battered bullock-trunk and my portmanteau."

"Yessir."

"And you understand you are not to leave any silver-mounted things about."

"Yessir."

"Oh, and Jonkin—reserve me a first-class carriage by the next morning's boat-train for Boulogne."

"Yessir."

"Be in it yourself."

"Yessir."

"With my dressing things."

"Yessir."

"And English clothes."

"Yessir."

"I will go as far as Amiens third class."

"Yessir."

"Oh—and Jonkin——"

"Yessir."

"If there's a beastly row in the railway-station and I'm in it, for God's sake don't look anxious, or as if you belong to me."

"No, sir," said Jonkin.

CHAPTER LXIX

Which treats of a Farewell Banquet to Departing Youth—whereat Gaston Latour glitters with at Hectic Glitter

The light of many candles set in a row along the white napery of the table showed but dimly in the large room, for the walls were hung with the sombre black cloth hangings that are drawn across the doors of churches in honour of the dead. The glint on plate and china and glass was chastened and modified by the solemn blackness of decorating black ribbons—large black bows upon the gilt necks of black bottles of champagne, narrow black bows upon the handles of knives and forks and stems of drinking glasses, and round salt-cellar and mustard-pot and cruet and centre dish. The menus were printed on large black-edged mourning-cards. Flower-bowls had given place to the painted wreaths of wire flowers that are placed in graveyards. The tablecloth was strewn with dead leaves.

The black figures of the waiters, who stood in solemn row to either side of the table, tricked out in the gloomy garb of hearse-lackeys, melted into the darkness behind them except for their pale faces, which caught the up-flung light from the candles that played upon chin and nostril and eye-pits, and sent shadows up their features, pronouncing the frown of expectancy with which they waited for the belated guests.

There was a loud blare ; a hunting-horn without began to bray the Dead March in *Saul*.

"Mon Dieu !" said a waiter.

"Silence !" growled the head waiter.

The door was flung open, and Horace entered in black, wearing black kid gloves, and followed by Gaston Latour, also in mourning and black kid gloves, blowing all the emotion of which he was master into the resounding brass of the great wind instrument that encircled his chest. And as the guests trooped in after them, all in black and wearing black kid gloves, students and their young womenfolk all taking their seats at the table with a titter, Gaston Latour solemnly tramped round the room behind the waiters in slow step, blaring the march of the dead, taking his lips from the brass mouthpiece only to imitate the roll of the kettle-drums and

to give the big drum's solemn announcement of doom with a loud "boom!"

When Horace had seen them all seated, he sat down.

But, in spite of the vigorous lead given by Gaston Latour, the jests did not come tripping to the call; laughter lost something of its hilarity; tongues that were wont to wag with airy wit were barren of banter; voices had a tendency to huskiness; quip and crank gave way to tales of the days that were gone—so they feasted for awhile with something of the fever gone out of their riot, and until the coffee came they sat unwontedly staid and hushed, and in reminiscence and story lived again their insolences and their rebuffs, their darings and their hesitations, their enthusiasms and their hardships, their glorious comradeships, their hero-worship, and their fantastic revelries. . . .

It was near midnight when a skull was passed round filled with little folded papers, and they cast lots for Horace's corduroy trousers. Gaston won the breeches, and had to deliver the funeral oration.

He stood up, pulled on his black kid gloves, and blew his nose strenuously, taking a long-sustained and melancholy note that sent a titter round the solemn row of waiters:

"Friends of my youth, companions of my unmitigated follies! the ancient figure that sits at the head of this table was once young—the years cannot rob him of that. And it is because he has not been ashamed to share his youngness with the lion and the ass that I rise to-night to bid you drink to the Passing of Youth in the mirth-provoking wines of France. This is the last mad moment of his splendid years; to-night his heroic follies are done; this room, where have been revelry and dance and song and wit and laughter and boon companionship, will know him no more. He is called home—across the sea-sick channel. He goes to shiver forlorn amidst the gloomy fogs of respectability. He will marry a staid wife and beget staid children and dine with lord mayors and wear white waistcoats over a self-conscious stomach. With the corduroy breeches of his studentship he has no more to do. Whither he goes there are no gay cafés—no riotous junketings. He will dance down the streets no more—shout no more—sing to the stars no more. Whither he goes the people are glum, grey-minded, commonplace—he must not sing, except out of tune, or monotonously, for fear of sin in the music—he must not dance, except with pre-arranged precision and with demure one, two, three to tunes that are piously bereft of all ecstasy. Revelry he will pass by with averted glance and eyes downcast. And yet, as he sits at his plethoric ease before the fire, after a full dinner, prosperous, rotund, bourgeois, he will nod, and nodding sleep—and in the freedom of dreams his ranging memory, rid for awhile of its crude discipline, will flit here, back to the old room, back to the bare walls—he will live again the blithe days of his fantastic youth; he will hear the echo of old laughter as his old jests set the ghosts of his old companions in a roar about the table; at break of day, as the mists rise from the river, he will skip down the

Boule Miche, the highway of youth ; he will caper through the dawn to blow out the stars above Montparnasse ; he will recall with a glow and a bracing of the nerves that he was acquainted with hardship and scarce knew it, for the streets were paved with gladness, and kind eyes made stars in his firmament on the blackest of nights, and he lodged amongst the skies—and in Paris. . . . Fill your glasses, comrades, and drink."

They all rose to their feet.

Latour raised his glass :

" Old man !" said he, with meaning accent on the threadbare words ; and " Old man !" cried they all, laughing, with a sob in the laugh.

Horace rose, when they sat down, telling them that he could not trust himself to speak otherwise than to say that it warmed his heart as it grieved his heart that he found himself seated amongst his dear companions for the last time in his old room. He raised his glass to Youth, to the comrades of youth, to the students' quarter, to the university, to the Boule Miche which was the highway of youth, to the great dead, to Paris, to France.

They all stood up and drank the toast in solemn silence ; and Horace standing there at the head of his table, they each passed by, handing him a keepsake for remembrance, grasped his hand, and after a husky greeting, strode out of the room.

Babette was the last to go. She went up to Horace, drew down his face between her white hands, and kissed him upon the mouth. He stroked her head ; they spake never a word. Her eyes filled with tears, and she hastily followed the others out of the room.

Horace was left alone with the solemn waiters.

He stood for awhile, too much touched to speak.

He roused himself at last with an effort.

" Jean !" he said.

The old head waiter came to him.

Horace held out his hand and grasped the shy hand of the other.

" Jean," said Horace—" you are an artist."

The man's face flushed with pleasure.

Horace took a banknote from his pocket and flung it on the table :

" Divide that amongst the waiters," he said ; " and, Jean, give this to your good wife—it will help little Marie to her dowry." He handed the man a crisp banknote ; and the old fellow's eyes filled with tears. . . .

As the door closed on Horace, one of them laughed :

" Ah, mon Dieu !" said he drily—" that they should ever grow wise !"

" Silence !" roared the old waiter.

Horace, as he passed through the doorway, was greeted by Gaston Latour :

" You must skip down the highway of youth for the last time,

Horace," said he. "You must once again eat the dawn on the Boule Miche. Forward, comrades!"

They, all hatted and cloaked, flung his cloak over his shoulders, set his black slouch hat upon his head, and together tramped down the stairs and out into the street; and, linking arms, the students and their young women strolled along the roadway and made for the Boule Miche, singing a rousing student song—the dark and deserted street echoing to the racket.

They came out on the Place St. Michel, took hands, and in the dim moonlight they danced in a wide ring before the fountain in the wall where in his niche the bronze saint slays the dragon at the threshold of the student's world.

Out of breath, they went and leaned over the parapet of the bridge of St. Michel, and then one sighed, and silence fell upon them all.

Out of the flood loomed the great towers of the Cathedral of Notre Dame, and low down and beyond twinkled the lights of the Morgue; and, beyond all, the waters of the river swirled into the mists sweeping on to the restless sea—out into the night and the eternal mystery.

Gaston Latour leading, they clambered down to the river's edge; and they sprinkled Horace with the waters of the Seine, and made him for ever a citizen of Paris.

Up they all clambered again, scaled the parapet, and joining hands, along the Boule Miche they went, singing—now forming a ring to dance round embarrassed policemen, now pounding shutters with their fists, greeting with a cheer the sleepy heads that were thrust out of open windows, blinking anxiously down into the night: and with these and the like tomfooleries, saluting the closed cafés where they had held their many light-hearted revels, they reached the garden of the Luxembourg—stood before the Pantheon—in the paling night they uncovered to the great dead. Thus silent, Horace stood for the last time as a student on the heights of Montparnasse. The immensity of the night was passing in purple majesty into the western heavens; and beyond, where the students' highway topped the hill, in the smoky twilight glittered the morning star.

CHAPTER LXX

Wherein a Comely Young Woman broods upon the Years

Horace shook hands with them all amidst their hearty promises to come and see him off, bade them good-night, and climbed the dark stairs to his rooms.

He pushed open the door of his studio to find the room possessed by the sombre twilight of the dawn. The heavy curtains that had hung across the great windows had been flung open, and the beginnings of light showed the deserted banquet, discovering a young woman who sat at the table, her face buried in her arms.

Horace shut the door gently and went and sat down beside her ; took off his black hat ; flung it on the table ; and, leaning towards her, his golden hair touching her dark masses, he put his hand upon her pretty head :

" Babette," said he.

She raised her head wearily, and leaning her elbow on the table, she set her dainty chin in her hand, and wiped the tears hurriedly from her eyes. She gazed moodily before her.

Horace took her hand :

" What are you thinking of, Babette ?"

She sighed.

" Why should I fill your heart with my sadness, Horace ?"

" Come, Babette."

" I have been thinking of the days that are gone, Horace—you have always been very gentle with me. . . . And—I have been thinking of the days that are to come——"

Her lips trembled ; and a tear stole down her cheek.

Horace nodded :

" Yes, Babette—and of the days to come !"

She sighed :

" I have been wondering whether you will think of me, Horace—as the days pass. I have been wondering—wondering—wondering——"

" Yes, Babette ?"

" But why should I tell you ?"

" Tell me, Babette," he said ; and he stroked her hair, gazing at her hungrily.

She uttered a little sob.

"Hush, Babette," said he. "Tell me everything."

She waited a little while:

"I have loved thee for love, Horace." She smiled sadly and stroked his hand. "Must I love now for livelihood? . . . To me the moonlight nights by lake and river can never be the nights they have been with thee. And he who walks beside me must needs feel it so. . . . You go home, Horace, to life—I go on here, growing old, year by year. I have been sitting here in the dark, peering at the years. One day the gaiety will go out of my heart, the freshness out of my looks, the colour out of my face, the light out of my eyes. Men turn and look at me now—their eyes smile at me. The time will come when men's eyes will pass me by. Students in the Boule Miche will say, 'She was some clever fellow's mistress—once.' And there will be laughter. So, one day I shall sit at the tables—alone; my only prospect—the grave. Yet—with some—memories. . . . My haggard eyes have been staring at these things all through the long night, and the disillusioning dawn has but confirmed the nightmare. . . . Yet, Horace, dear heart, I have done nothing to deserve it—except in loving thee . . . except in loving thee, dear heart."

The tears brimmed over her eyelids, and her voice was stayed in a sob.

Horace took her tear-wet face between his hands and kissed her upon the eyes and mouth:

"Listen, Babette," said he hoarsely—"thou hast wept thy last and thy only tears for any harshness from me. Dost thou think, dear heart, that I who have never found thee guilty of the smallest meanness will leave thee alone because, forsooth, thou hast loved me well! Dost thou think that thy dear hands and thy sight and thy breath and thy hearing and thy sweet bosom are not become a part of me! Tush! we have been married these many months. In a month from now thou must go through the law's farce with me—but thou art my very wife—thou canst be no more to me than that, nor I to thee——"

"No, Horace—thou hadst better leave me. It would be a jibe against thee——"

"Tush!" He laughed huskily. "Thy train and steamboat passage are bought hours ago—there is a room preparing for thee in my father's house. . . . Thou canst surely bear to be a maid again for thirty days!"

She laughed, and flung her arms about him and kissed his hair:

"I love thee, fool," she said; "and will share thy folly. . . ."

"Look," said Horace—"the room is full of light—the sun will soon be peeping over the roofs. We must be packing. I have kept my best trunk for thy belongings, Babette."

She laughed:

"It will take no time—I have as little wardrobe as dowry to bring thee, Horace."

"You always look so well, Babette," said he—"I had not realized thou hadst not even a trunk till the night before last. . . . Thou must be at the Louvre as early as the big shops open

this morning, and buy all thou canst buy of gowns and kick-shaws in an hour. . . . It will save thee from fretting upon the hardship of thy life with me, Babette, until we leave. Where is thy purse ?"

She laughed and handed him her light purse.

He bulged it out with banknotes.

"Thou must spend all this in gowns," he said.

She took the notes and unfolded them upon the table :

"But—but, Horace, this will buy me many silk gowns—we must not waste——"

He kissed her, and laughed :

"I forgot to tell thee about the insignificant things—we are rich, Babette."

The tears came into her eyes :

"But—but—I shall shame thee, Horace——"

He kissed her quivering lips to silence her :

"Then God send me shame, Babette," he said ; and he added, with a twinkle in his laughing eyes : "My sisters will judge thee largely by thy clothes, so buy for thyself as thou wouldst buy for my honour and my credit."

She laughed gaily ; then a frown knit the handsome brows.

"What is it, Babette ?"

"Only an hour to buy a trousseau !" she sighed. "An hour is such a little while."

He laughed loud and long ; and she laughed at his laughter.

"No, Babette," said he—"no, no, not thy wedding-dresses. Buy just thy few gowns to fill my trunk. Thou wouldst not rob my sisters of a month's shopping, thou selfish egoist. They are rich—and must have employment."

"I may not find gowns that will fit me," she said.

"Thy needle will do the fitting."

She sat, the happy tears in her handsome eyes, her hand in his, and gazed at the coming day.

"What !" said he—"thou wouldst weep !"

She kissed his fingers, put her dainty palm on his lips :

"Supposing thy sisters——"

She hesitated.

"I am taking thee home, Babette, to teach my sisters manners," he said.

She laughed :

"And thy father, Horace ?"

He put his hands on her slender shoulders :

"Babette," said he—"I have told my father you are of the De la Rues of Paris."

She laughed gaily.

He frowned at her in mock solemnity :

"Thou must not laugh at that jest before my father," he said. "My father believes in the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Nobility and Me. It's his only creed. Thou must never shake a man's religious faith, my Babette. And he will love thee, with his rough love—for thou art very beautiful—and—thou lovest me."

She slipped her hand through his arm, and nestled her face close to his :

" Horace," she said simply—" I will tell thee now what I had intended to tell thee never : there is a little one coming—a little child——"

He was filled with a great silence and wonder.

He sat holding her slender fingers and gazing at her shy eyes. He put out his hand and placed it upon her breasts :

" And what if it usurp my place and oust me from thy fragrant bosom ?" he said.

She laughed a low happy laugh :

" Ah, Horace ; that would be fearful," she said in gay raillery, " for thou mightest then treat the little one as harshly as thou hast used me. . . ."

Thus they thou'd and thee'd and kissed and kissed again, until the sun peeped in over the eastern window's ledge, and touched the young man's hair.

She put her hand upon his head :

" Thou art pure gold," she said.

CHAPTER LXXI

Which treats of a Harmless Riot amongst such as Dwell on Mount Parnassus

Horace descended from Mount Parnassus in a whirlwind. Indeed, he had a keen sense for the becomingness of things. He was the poor student to the end. He departed from Bohemia in the tattered habit of Bohemia and after the fashion of Bohemia—indeed, it was splendid poverty.

The courtyard swarmed with students, and Gaston Latour stood solemnly directing the devilries, his pale face more than usually tricked with gloom, his dreamy poetic eyes dark with melancholy, his lips sounding blood-curdling ear-splitting blares upon his hunting-horn, regardless of all the municipal laws against the use of the same except at public festivals. The place was astir with chatter and laughter and fool's play and the coming and going of feet.

In the midst of the ferment, Horace and others were securing his baggage to a handcart, the embarrassed porter standing to one side, his hands itching to do the roping.

A loud blare from Latour's hunting-horn—and there was silence.

Horace strode up to the fat concierge, who stood on the steps with her three small children, the better to see the sights. He lifted each of the little ones, gave them a hug, and setting them down on the steps again, slipped a large silver piece into the small fingers. He took off his hat, and kissed the jolly old woman upon the cheek before them all, and slipped a hundred-franc note into her rough toil-worn hand. The little ones began to cry, and the concierge, the tears in her eyes, told them not to be stupid.

Horace patted them on the head :

" I'm coming back to play with you, you lazy little rascals," said he ; and putting on his hat, he pulled it well over his eyes.

He strode over to the handcart, and at a sign from him, they seized the porter and hove his expostulating bulk a-top of the baggage, where he was compelled to sit for the remainder of the journey across Paris to the railway-station of the north, in embarrassed discomfort ; and Horace getting between the shafts, a bevy of students set the light rattling affair moving on clattering

wheels, and the noisy party, pushing, pulling, and hauling and bawling, marched out of the courtyard in escort amidst the waving of handkerchiefs from windows and the last farewells.

A fussy burgess, put to the wall with some indignity by the stream of careless students, went up to a group of police and reminded them that the hunting-horn was not allowed to be blown in Paris except on certain high festivals.

His venom was wasted.

The police shrugged amused shoulders :

" It is true," said they—" but it is only the students. . . ."

As they came into the Boule Miche, singing the National Anthem, the landlords of the taverns and cafés and the white-aproned waiters came out to their doors, and greeted the noisy crew—indeed, Horace was well known, and his genial ways and amiable personality robbed him of all enemies.

Horace, amid handshakings down the street, foreseeing that the catching of the train was becoming a nice question and thinking Babette looked pale, took advantage of a moment's breathing-space to whisper to the girl that she had better drive off to warn his man Jonkin that they might be late ; and Babette was glad to get into a passing fiacre and slip away. Her heart was too full for jesting that had tears in the jest.

The noisy crew got the handcart on the run as soon as they crossed the river, the jolted porter a-top, but rattled up the Rue la Fayette in none too good time ; as they dashed into the great station the bustle of departure that comes before the leaving of the boat-train was at its noisy height.

The officials were quite unable to cope with the students, who, chaffing them, rushed and swarmed over the barriers and took possession of the platform.

The man at the barrier laughed, shrugged shoulders :

" It is only the students," he said.

Gaston Latour, gloomily dancing the *danse de ventre* on the platform, was assailed by a pompous fussy little man in uniformed authority, who alone displayed sufficient lack of tact to interfere with the young bloods. Gaston stooped down ; solemnly stroked the official protruding paunch, and putting his ear thereto, said " Cough !"

The sulky fellow growled threats :

" My God," said Gaston—" he is wasting away !"

The surly fellow made as if to go.

Gaston Latour grabbed him and listened at his stomach again :

" He has a bad heart," he said ; flung his arms round his neck, and crying over his shoulder hysterically, he wailed melancholy sobs down the great hunting-horn. He had a grotesque mind. . . .

And thus, amidst frantic foolings and warm hand-grippings and promises of early return, the train steamed slowly out of the huge station, taking Horace away from the days of his youth—for he had realized during the night that was gone that manhood was come upon him.

CHAPTER LXXII

Wherein our Hero is ill at ease with his own Shadow

THE train being gone, and Horace borne away, Noll drew aside from the noisy crowd of departing students that strolled chattering and jocular from the scene of their leave-taking. He walked home alone.

When he climbed to his room, the loneliness yawned at him out of the void of the empty place. Every shadow, every chair, the bed, the whole deserted place, whispered that Betty was gone.

He moved restlessly about his rooms all day, chafed and fretted, and, when the twilight fell, he as aimlessly fidgeted out into the dusk and betook himself to the streets of Paris.

And as he strode moodily along, nagging whispers went with him—unpleasant questionings nudged at his elbow—irking discomfort plucked at his sleeve.

He had very clearly realized during the last few days that, good fellows as they were, Horace and his companions were all taken up with their own affairs—that they were really only genially interested in him in relation to themselves—that he was interested in them in relation to himself. Not a soul had asked a word about Betty. He resented it—yet he knew that his neglect of her alone had been the beginning of her being set aside from their ken. If he felt so of a sudden about their neglect of her, what must she have felt about his neglect of her ? God, how he had let her drop out of everything !

He knew now that his one selfless friend had been this girl—this handsome dainty woman. And he had let her go out into the dusk, alone—leaving him alone.

And for what ?

He laughed bitterly.

It came to him now, a whisper in his ear, that her brain was worth all the wits of all these others put together. It was revealed to him that most of the keenly observant, large, and humane phrases that had sounded the music of well-spoken insight to his understanding had been hers.

Of a sudden he realized what an appalling obstacle his indifference to her confidences about her work must have been ! Indifference ? Nay, he had shown a harsher snarl than that. What

a chill to her enthusiasms and to the practice of her craft must have been all his silent discouragement—or lack of encouragement. . . . Stay—had it even been silent ? There had been his ill-concealed impatience with the patience of her building. Had there not indeed been hints without disguise about her work being long enough in the doing ? He could have cut out his tongue for its jeer about priggish dilatoriness and Casauban's *Key to all the Mythologies*. His ill-manners and his neglect struck him in the face, and he shrank from it now with a burning sense of shame—his face scalded. What would he not have given to recall the shabby jibe !

He turned into a café and was greeted with a shout. And in the resulting rolic, for several hours, he forgot his self-recriminations. But in the black night, taking himself homewards, it struck him like a buffet upon the mouth delivered out of the surrounding darkness. He had lacked manhood.

Reaching his rooms, a dozen petty discomforts assailed him to remind him of the mother-care and gentle hands that no longer showed their tenderness—on striking a light, the stealthy shadows stole away skulkingly into the corners, mocking at his loneliness, nudging elbows at him.

He lit a candle, and sat down on the side of his bed.

It was borne in upon him, sitting there in solitary communion with his own unmitigated selfishness, that the man alone is not a human entity.

Ay, Noll ; thou art not the only numskull—the very nations share thy cap and bells. Man is indeed incomplete without the woman. Any scheme of life that eliminates the woman is a futile scheme of life. The human animal is not one, but two—man without woman is wholly incomplete, a crudity, inadequate, a fatuity, and hence a thing of shame.

Nay, the lad had glimmerings into depths deeper than that ; gazing at the naked truth of things, it came to him that any scheme of life wherein the woman is made inferior degrades the man with her degradation, since she is a part of him—and a part of a man in a state of humiliation humiliates the whole of him.

He wondered what she was doing ; whether they were being kind to the sensitive, large-hearted, dainty Betty.

A sob caught at his throat. He knew—with a hot flush he knew—it was the first generous thought that had moved him these many days. He had been pitying himself like a whipped cur, the which never yet brought a man honour or comfort or dignity.

Wo-hee-ho-ho ! moaned the scoffing wind without.

What was she doing—out there—in the dark ?

Ah, Noll—what, indeed ?

The very shadows bent to hear.

But, Ho-ho-hey ! scoffed the mocking wind.

CHAPTER LXXIII

Wherein our Hero dabbles his Hands in the Turgid Waters of Philosophy, and brings up Some Grains of Truth from a Pebbly Bottom. A Chapter that the Frivolous would do well to skip —the Ironies being infrequent, if not wholly wanting; and the Humours lacking in the Comic Interest

For days Noll fretted restlessly about his room and the streets of the city.

He went back to his old haunts—to the practice of his assiduous idlenesses. But the fever had gone out of his pleasant habits; and the talk of his fellows was become stale.

He lingered on—lonesomely but doggedly.

So the days passed into weeks; the weeks stole away the months.

Noll could not shake off a strange sense of humiliation. Shrug his shoulders as he might at the pathetic silence that had taken the place of Betty's mellow voice, humiliation nudged elbows with him, peered into his frowning eyes, was not to be rebuffed by his sullen face. He was a prey to self-contempt. The devil of regret takes hard snubbing. And no man lies intelligently to his own conscience.

He took refuge in letters.

This galling humiliation had set him soul-searching. . . . Rudderless, aimless, floating on the sea of pleasant tides, he now gazed in tribulation at gulfs that yawned before him and about him and beyond—the Whence and the Why and the Whither of this Present Seeming. And as the learning of old spent itself in the search for the Philosopher's Stone, so the virile imagination of youth, steeping itself in written wisdom, went a-questing for the secret of life.

Everywhere, where men thought at all and were not content with hereditary thinking, the whole concept of life was being shaken to its base. The barbaric Eastern statement of an all-powerful, all-seeing, all-creating, all-wise God as a huge blunder-

ing image of man, taken up with the essaying of experiments, was a fatuous contradiction that mocked at the majesty of the secret of life. Inspiration that cannot face the truth is not saved thereby, but wholly inadequate ; indeed, the first aim of a lie is to evade the truth.

Rejecting the crude and garish guesses, the untenable dogma, the juggling conventions of theology, the young fellow had, with the confidence of youth, relied on the intellect for the solution of the problem of life. Indeed, it is abundantly clear that out of the base metal of untruth, at any rate, the key to the great mysteries of life shall not be forged. So, rightly looking to knowledge as an essential element in the search for the key to the secret of life, the youth had gone further and looked to the intellect to be that key—only to find himself in a blind alley with museums at end. The intellect but labelled and pigeon-holed the facts of life in this museum of consciousness. But he had stumbled in solemn company enough—a goodly bevy of the world's philosophers stood bewildered in the same chill marble place—the labels were all strictly accurate, but the specimens were dead.

Whatever the answer to the riddle of the world, man's only key is through the doors of the intellect and of the senses. Suspicious of the senses, the youth had relied implicitly on the intellect. It came to him now that the uttermost truth, the secret of life, was beyond man's reason.

Indeed, the priest who thunders the loudest against agnosticism is the greatest agnostic of them all—who, asked for the absolute details that lie beyond the grave, must give for answer, robbed of all vague talk of God and devil and heavens and hells, " I know not." Nay, when reason outsteps his theologic acceptances, is he not first to stab at reason ? The theologian clamours for the law ; but his statements of the law are the veriest guesses. The solemn law of one generation may be the laughing-stock of the next—the crimes of the further next. The idols of one church are the derision of another. Men have been burnt for cast-iron gods by others whose sole claim to godliness was in the lacking humour to laugh at cast-iron gods.

If there be a God, His majesty shall not be sought in a noisy and blundering travesty of Man. Good Master Paley touched the sublime humour when he made the world designed for man—wholly forgetting even the fleas.

Indeed, the veriest savage can show the titles to his most brutal savageries in guesses, when all's said.

And this very solid world that wounds the stumbling foot, is it not but an idea to each ? the solid reality dying for us in our dying—to the flab jelly-fish this splendid wayfaring being even in the living not wholly of the same seeming as to you and me and the other.

Yet wholly and absolutely sure are we that all is. Whatever madness possess us, we know the Achievement. For he who splits hairs with his reason, and affirms that nothing exists, except in our imagination, is like to him who thrusts his head

against a stone wall ; and will find that the wall and his thinking-machinery are, but do not matter. There is no gain in juggling with facts. Matter is matter, and life is life, and denial but denial.

Knowledge of the intellect has in it no creative power, no vitalizing essence—cannot give life. The meaning of life must be lived. Nay, knowledge of the intellect is not even the incentive to life—not so much as instigator of our most paltry acts. The instincts and the emotions and intuition are the more vigorous masters and compellers of our living—are outside knowledge—independent of it—often opposed to it, overwhelming it, setting it aside at slightest desire carelessly, contemptuously, passionately.

And then——

The brutes of the field have not reason ; yet are they moved by this same mystery of life ; their flame goes out in the same strange mystery of death ! That which is the secret of life in man must also be the secret of life in all else. . . .

The youth had been overwhelmed in the darkness that had shown beyond the impotence of the intellect. He was aroused by the literature of Romanticism. He opened the book of the wisdom of Schopenhauer ; it led to the page of life to which he had now turned. The German pointed a guiding finger.

Even if the brain's ken were not limited, it is impotent. But, fortunately, there is a secret stair to the mystery of life. Not by way of the intellect, but by way of the emotions may we pierce to the secret of existence. Life expresses itself through the senses. The emotions hold more of the ultimate mystery than all the vapour-filled brains of philosophers, be they priest or schoolmaster——

The youth thought he had discovered the answer to the riddle of life.

Searching deep down into his own being, frankly, with the unembarrassed gaze of himself for sole company, fearlessly, candidly, and in the decent silence, peering for the innermost essence of existence, he perceived throughout all seeming incongruities and inconsistencies and warnings, a strange all-compelling energy which this snarling Schopenhauer called the Will to Live—a blind, never-resting, never-satisfied want—a fierce desire for life.

He saw that the body is but the earthly habitation for the use of this mystic breath of life whereby alone may life achieve its compelling urging for the fulness of experience. The intellect was wonderful, as were all the body's functions ; heart and belly and the rest ; but it and they were only the instruments by which the inspiration of life protected itself from destruction, guiding itself through the dangers that beset it in the substantial world or threatened its continuance—through pain shrinking from the dangers of destruction ; through pleasure moving forward eagerly towards a fuller experience ; through hope which encourages, and fear which makes to hesitate ; through love

which draws it to its fellows and its mate, and hate which warns it of its enemies—for in marriage is continuance and evolving, in hate is denying. Thus fares the sensate vehicle of the body, enabling life to destroy its foes, above all to realize manifold emotions, and to hand itself on with an added heritage of experience to a higher wayfaring.

Everywhere was absolute confirmation. Science, all that was known of the solid world, confirmed it. Experience confirmed it. History confirmed it. The senses confirmed it. Instinct confirmed it. Everywhere, in all, common to man and brute, was this overwhelming, fierce, all-compelling urging to live the fulness of experience.

The key unlocked the secret of the very mountains and the waters. Out of the vasty space this mighty urging of life creating itself into the vehicles of worlds, creating itself from worlds into more emotional creatures upon the world, gathers into forms, attracts, repels, coheres into shapes, reaches to the mystery of crystals. Baffled by the rigidity of the rocks, dissipated in the elusiveness of the waters, the mystic life gropes its way towards subtler channels of embodiment. On through the flowers of the field this urging to fuller life gropes towards emotion—and, freed from its root's anchorage to the rigid soil, behold, out of the yeasty ooze it realizes itself through fish and reptile and bird into beast. On, through the brute, increasing by rebirth, at first blindly seeking to fulness in the humblest sensations, working up from stage to stage, struggling and striving always to feel the fullest emotions, developing for itself bodily organs which shall nourish it and do it service, that it may most fully achieve itself—it essays to fullest experience through brute force and reaches by struggle of the physically fittest to the body of the lion and the tiger and monster—retires baffled from mere bodily force, and, essaying through the cunning of the brain its fuller fulfilment, forms for its embodiment the nimble ape. For its protection and aggrandisement the brain's cunning gives craft to the hands and sets them to the making of tools, and lo! at a stroke the rushlight of early reason thrusts the savage above the brute. It steps down from the trees, and Man, finding his hands' use, and straddling on two legs, stands upright and a-wonder. The miracle has happened. Life has become conscious of itself.

And, God! what a seething hell of misery it looks upon!

The youth shut the second book of the wisdom of Schopenhauer, his brows set, and gazed with sad eyes at the Tragedy of Existence. He was overwhelmed with the sorrow of the world.

This untameable never-satisfied urging to fulness of life that stirs at the heart of all things, what had it wrought? Seen glumly through the spectacles of Pessimism the light went out of the heavens. The youth flinched from the welter of the universe.

What a welter it was! what a shambles!

The hawk preying on the exquisite design that is the body of the small feathered songster—the tiger slaying for daily food the

timid deer that is innocent of malignity to him—the wolf flying at the throat of the lamb—the rabbit taking fearfully to the earth to be cruelly slain in his hiding-place by the ferret. Everywhere life taking life. No refuge from the brutal struggle. Man battening on his fellow-man. The cruel and the unscrupulous, in war, in commerce, in Church and State, treading under foot their gentler companions—self-interest the one god. Man going to church of a Sunday to listen with bowed head to a plan of life which it is his sole aim to evade for the rest of the week—and, as crown to his hypocrisies, marching to battle with songs of the Prince of Peace to slay his fellows.

Tssh! the brutality of it! the cursed cruelty of it! the bestiality of it!

Success in life! what was it but the record of other hearts broken, other spirits crushed, other homes rendered desolate?

Everywhere was aggression, pursuit, sorrow, suffering. The rich trampling down the poor. The beautiful body built only to decay. The love of life given, to be baffled by death. At the end of all our hopes and strivings and ambitions yawns the grave.

Everywhere sorrow and pain.

We remember pain. The agonies cling in the recollection—the joys are forgot. Health is not realized until it is gone—nor youth—nor liberty. Yet these are amongst the greatest good. Even enjoyment is damped by habit. Opposition and disappointment were sure—and always—and everywhere.

This very intellect, that raised man above the brute, and gave the fuller powers in the struggle for life—what happiness did it bring? It dangled hopes and ambitions and joys before the eyes, simply to deceive the passionate urging of life to fiercer struggle for life.

The intellect! man's boast over the brute—it was the crown of thorns.

Intellect! which was given as the last plague—the brutes had been spared *that*. Thought warring with impulse; the love of beauty and of justice fighting the appetites and the body's yearnings which impel our actions to the brutal struggle for life; contemplation upon the ignobleness of these appetites and base injustices and greeds impotent before the overwhelming lusts and impulses and emotions of the body.

Imagination!—to shrink from the seething dunghill of the world.

Was there any deliverance from this miserable tyranny of life? Only by boldly standing across the path of life and refusing to share in it.

He opened the third book of the wisdom of Schopenhauer, and he found the two means that Pessimism has found, by denial, to accept life in full—art for art's sake, and the asceticism of religion.

By steeping self in the contemplation of the beauty of works of art, outside and aloof from self, in the contemplative pleasure of craftsmanship and artistry we may escape for awhile from the

brutal urgings of our life, forget for awhile the brutal struggle for existence round about and at every hand, ignore the cruelty of the world. In the subtle pleasure that comes from a work of art can we alone be purely contemplative——

Yes—this Schopenhauer fellow had wisdom.

The Youth put his hand upon the book, and by the gods he swore it, he would follow art for art's sake. He would seek salvation from the tyranny of living in the contemplation of the beautiful.

CHAPTER LXXIV

Which sees the Day break in the Tavern of The Golden Sun

A MISTY dark night. The drizzle that slowly drenched the town met with but damp welcome the students and revellers as they poured out of the Bal Bullier at midnight; it sent them swarming into the genial warmth and cheery glitter of the cafés on the Boule Miche.

And the inhospitable rain, having emptied the streets, slyly took itself off into the outer darkness and passed out of the city, leaving the trees weeping in the blackness.

Noll, wearied by the frantic foolings of the students' Bal Bullier, put up the collar of his coat, and finding that the drizzle no more wet his face, he strolled down the Boule Miche, struck across the cobbles of the riverside quays, and striding into the murk that hung about the river, he found himself on the bridge. He stood and leaned over the parapet, peering into the blackness of the foggy depths that swirled in pitchy fumes below.

The yeasty stillness yielded a sob.

A young woman's voice near at hand spoke low.

Aubrey's voice answered her, impatiently. The fog carried every inflection of his drawling irritation and peevish insolence. He pshawed :

"Women take love so seriously," he said—"it is women who spoil it. . . . Love is the pastime of life, the gaiety of days, a thing to enrich the senses, to give man his recreation—and women filch it of the very essence of its charm by making it the sordid business of life. Robbed of its delicate mysteries, of its butterfly flitting from flower to flower, it becomes—marriage—and the begetting of children—and the clamour of household needs—and milk-bottles—and soiled linen. . . . Why are you not content to love many men, Hélène, as I have found the rhapsody of life in loving many women ? . . . It is the spiritual——"

"The spiritual !"

She laughed a little harsh laugh ; and added sharply :

"Come, master Aubrey—we know each other too well to make it worth while to lie—it deceives neither ourselves nor the other ; wherefore then the intention of it ? . . . I would only ask you not to love the other woman *before* me——"

She was seized with a violent fit of coughing.

"Come," she said hoarsely, "this air is killing me—I must have warmth—I am starving, body and soul."

"The tavern of *The Golden Sun* does not close till daybreak," he said sullenly.

She laughed sadly:

"Yes," she said—"they turn life upside down—the artists—like the religious. . . ." She sighed consent. "All right. We will go there."

They passed Noll, where he leaned against the parapet of the bridge, almost touching him.

He roused moodily and followed the sound of their footsteps in the pitchy murk.

He, too, would go to the tavern of *The Golden Sun*.

He turned to his left as he stepped off the bridge, and kept by the river-wall.

There came to him now and then through the clammy darkness ahead the sound of the girl's coughing. This woman was Hélène, the fragile beauty whom Aubrey had filched from her easy-going husband, a young doctor of the commercial quarter across the river. In the letter she had written to bid the honest commonplace fellow farewell (Aubrey had told it at a tavern merry-making amidst the sly laughter of his fellows) she had complained that he had no romance, that the very soles of his thick and clumsy boots were like his own solid soul, an offence to her sense of the subtleties—that she must out into the world to seek romance and the colour of life. The blow had fallen out of a serene day in the face of the poor fellow, and it was matter of common report that he had reeled from it—he, being unpoetical and unappreciative of the picturesque glamour of wickedness, had not even appreciated that he was party to a romance—had taken instead to avoiding his fellows and was walking with Shame—furtively, unheroically. Paris had laughed. And the girl——

She was getting her fill of crude adventure now. . . .

Out of the reek there came again to Noll the pitiful cough. The footsteps stopped for awhile. A quickly suppressed sob. Again footsteps.

In the sombre gliding river below, the green lights of vaguely looming blacknesses that were canal-boats, splashed emerald flames in the inky flood. Loomed now across the waters the massive solidity of the twin-towered cathedral, black against the black night; and beyond and low down upon the pitchy tide the pale lights that burn all night in the house of the dishonoured dead gleamed through the window-slats of the Morgue.

Noll, hearing the cough again, roused to the sound that the others had left the river-side. He crossed the drenched quays, and leaving the river behind him, struck into a narrow street that was possessed by the spectral wraithes flung down the grimy old walls by the ghostly lamps that hung thereon. Along the gloomy thoroughfare the chill airs, from the river hard by, set the lamp's flame flickering, and sent dusky shadows moving stealthily out of

dingy doorways and black corners, shadows that stealthily stole back again. And amidst the silent spectres, flecked by the down-flung light of the creaking wall-lamps, flitted the figures of the man and woman ; and back from amongst the ghostly wraithes came the pitiful harsh cough.

Their shadowy figures turned into the squalid street that is called the Rue Galande ; and Noll closely followed them, they came to a halt before the low arch of a doorway and stepped out of sight.

When Noll reached the arch, the red maw of which yawned into the sordid street, he saw by the legend written upon the glass of the battered gas-lamp which hung awry overhead that he was at the threshold of the tavern of *The Golden Sun*. Across the dark stretch of rudely paved courtyard beyond, the two figures were passing blackly under the yellow flood of a gas-lamp, the restless flame of which showed a flight of steps leading underground. The twain descended into the gloom of the passage and were swallowed in the cellars from which came a gust of song and the sound of music as the doors opened and shut upon them.

Noll descended the steps, pushed open the doors at the bottom, and stepped into the tavern of *The Golden Sun*.

He blinked at the lighted room, dim as it was. The heavy air, laden with the fumes of beer, and hazy with the clouds of tobacco-smoke, met him with a pleasant warmth of welcome.

Through the haze he saw that the people sat, silently giving their whole attention to a slender youth who stood at the far end of the room declaiming verse, leaning upon a piano—a grey-haired musician touching mellow chords gently and running a light accompaniment of music atune with the speaker's fine voice.

Noll was little in need of the superfluous pantomime of a burly thick-set waiter who made melodramatic signs to him to stand still—to make no sound.

As he stood there, listening to the telling accents of the young poet, his eyes ranged over the strange gathering of bohemians who sat about the little round tables. They were shabby enough, some of them, to have been the denizens of a thieves' kitchen ; but there was an atmosphere of culture abroad that took all incongruity from the noble sentiments and subtlety of accent that fell from the lips of the poet in that dingy place.

The women who sat at the tables were not the gay butterflies that flitted in silk and satin about the glittering cafés of the Boule Miche. Their picturesqueness was of a more subtle kind, and its daintiness shone through the pitiful simplicity of meagre apparel.

Here were no rollicking students ; here was no frantic fooling ; here was a note in the air that Noll had not yet heard sounding in gatherings that laid more strenuous claims to the pursuit of art.

His eyes ranging, caught signs from Aubrey to go and sit beside him ; and, the poem ending in a dulcet pathetic sigh for the eternal tragedy of life, Noll took advantage of the resulting bravos and

applause to make his way to Aubrey's table. The quick-eyed waiter was there as soon as he, and bawled Noll's order for three bocks of beer to the patroness, who shrilly echoed it.

Aubrey was frankly glad to see him ; and it was soon abundantly clear to Noll that he was as frankly glad to be relieved from the sole entertainment of the pallid woman beside him. Hélène, too, roused to interest in the fine young Englishman—the frown left her handsome brows.

The grey-haired musician ran his slender fingers over the keys of the piano ; and there stepped on to the little platform on which it stood the only man who seemed out of place in that strange company of dreamers. Burly, powerful, big-headed, with cunning eyes that count profits, slits above baggy underlids, he was of the blonde breed that plans and orders—full-bellied, calculating, of those whose fat hands get money, and, with short grasping pointed fingers, hold it when got. He rang a little bell, and silence followed its tinklings.

Hélène leaned over to Noll :

" He is *The Golden Sun*," she whispered, and laughed low.

He had the honour to announce that Madame Hélène would declaim an apostrophe from her last written work.

The young woman arose simply, smiled to Noll, and making her way to the piano, took her place before it amidst a salvo of applause ; and with a strange thrill in her husky voice, she spoke of the cruelty of Nature, the eyes glowing in the deep shadows of her fine brows that gleamed white amidst the massses of her tawny hair, where she stood below the light, gracefully poised against the piano. She uttered the exquisitely phrased sentences in a well modulated low voice that was vibrant with suppressed passion, without trick, without gesture. . . . The warfare of life was unceasing, unmerciful. Race struck at race, man lay in wait for man —on the mart, on the field of battle, in love, robbed the one the other of the simplest needs of life. . . . Everywhere was struggle —everywhere was strenuous rivalry—at the end of all, the grave. . . . The caged bird, what a thing of pity ! Denied the range of life, destitute of its mate, its wings cramped, its functions atrophied—yet—open the door of its narrow prison, let it but fly across the sweet-scented meadows, and a hawk swings out of the heavens, falls from the splendid blue, and strikes with rending claws, and tears out with cruel well-contrived beak the little life from the delicately designed beauty of the songster. . . . Why flutter against the encaging bars ? why struggle ever to be in the winds and the free airs ? Tush ! wherein was freedom but to flee from death ? The little fragile thing had the gift of song ; let it be glad that it had the gift of song.

She uttered the pity of it in the most caressing tongue that the nations have wrought ; and when she had spoken the last word, she bowed to the thunder of applause, came back to the table, and seated herself by Noll with a freedom from conceit that touched him.

They came and clasped her hand, and gave her ungrudging

praise, with all the airs and kindly dignity of France. And Noll noticed that Aubrey was gone. . . .

The room was gay with banter and laughter, glasses clinked, the waiter sped about busily, bawling orders, and the smoke of cigarettes clouded the ceiling.

And, of a truth, the atmosphere of the place had a strange fascination for Noll.

Here were no longer the crude essayings, and the more crude aims of fledgling studenthood. He was weary of the fierce partisanship, the shifting foundations, the tentative idols of their passing frenzies, this taking of sides about things that did not matter.

These people were out of the years of their apprenticeship to the arts.

Here, on the other hand, was no posing at all costs for outrageous originality, no seeking for the eccentric aspect of things, none of the fantastic extravagances that marked the revels of the sordid gatherings in the taverns of Montmartre—for these people had no desire to the breaking of idols, the outraging of the decencies, the mocking at ideals.

Art, to these people, was the one serious aim of life.

There was scarce a line uttered this night, whether of recited poem or song or criticism, which was not perfect in the expression, exquisite and subtle in the phrasing. There was that air of tactful restraint and of rightness of statement which in manners are called good breeding. And if the emotions uttered were somewhat thin or exaggeratedly sad or tinged overmuch and disproportionately with the grey half-tones of the pathos of life, if vigour and the strenuous music of the bright days and the gaiety of life were almost wholly absent, there was at any rate a feeling for beauty and a sobbing appeal to the pity of the world for such as are overwhelmed by the destiny of tragedy that held something of nobility.

These men and women were content, if a neglectful world so ordered it, to live here in obscurity and poverty, their sole incentive to life the worship of beauty. Upon the workaday world they turned careless shoulders — and for them the workaday world, in grim retort, had no uses, no honours. The worst sin to them was to be Philistine. Here they met together at a time when drowsy citizens were getting into their unthinking beds—here they were happy in the companionship of their fellows throughout the long night, exchanging their ideas of the beautiful, their polished gentle wit, their praises—here, shrugging contemptuous shoulders at the conventions of the world, men and women lived and loved as they listed.

If the world should one day awaken to the works of their genius, so much the better for the world—if it should clamour for their poesy, their song, their works of art, well and good. They would be glad that the world had taste enough to give them fame. But the world must come to them. . . . It would make life easier—their clothes would be less shabby—hunger less biting, less insistent. But what had the world to give them better than the love of beauty or more pleasant than the comradeship of them that

knew beauty when they saw it ? The generations perhaps would greedily seek the work of their brains ; fame would come if it came.

So said they, gentle-mannered, shabbily attired, simple-hearted, warming their starved blood with brandy and bocks of beer and accursed brain-stealing absinthe, living on each other's kindliness and praise and genial comradeship, living in dreams, walking on air, wayfarers in cloudland, scorning all meannesses, garnering with difficulty the poorest sustenance for daily bread, cheerful though the frost bit and the hunger thinned their already lean ribs, and penurious want made their blankets few—proud in their dignity, pitiful to every suffering thing.

Why heed the sensational events of the day ? what mattered that a Minister had fallen ? what did it matter that a scandal was washing dirty linen in the streets ? Such things were dead and buried and forgot in nine days—but art and music and poetry remained, beauty was eternal. Why compete in the sordid money-grubbing race for wealth ? We must all die. Why this strenuous hurrying to the open grave ?

So they reasoned. And they brought to their meeting no sign or word of their hard struggle for daily bread. They brought to their comradeship only laughter and wit and gentle faces and smiles. . . .

The small hours of the night passed.

It was nearing five o'clock, and the room began to thin of its frequenters. Noll called the waiter and paid the reckoning of saucers for himself and Hélène. She arose with him to go ; and as they opened the doors and stepped out of the heavy air of the room, the grey dawn had broken and the dingy lamp of *The Golden Sun* was paling into insignificance in the chill day.

As they reached the river, they found, swathed in multitudinous wraps, a stout woman who was selling hot milk and rolls. Noll did not ask the girl, but ordered a couple of bowls of the comforting stuff and a roll. The girl drank the milk gladly ; and of the roll she was very careful not to lose the crumbs.

Noll took her to her poor room on the fifth story where was her threadbare home.

At the threshold she asked him in.

He smiled.

He took her pathetic face between his two hands, and kissed her upon the wan cheek :

" No, Hélène," he said—" I love another woman."

She turned and went into her room.

As he descended the stair she came out to him again :

" Will you be at *The Golden Sun* to-night ?" she asked—her lips a little anxious and apart—beautiful lips.

He hesitated—pondered—smiled :

" Yes," he said.

As Noll crossed the Boule Miche a white mist hung over the river ; at the far end of the students' highway the heavens were chilly grey ; all the stars were burnt out of the drab firmament.

CHAPTER LXXV

Wherein our Hero goes out into the Night

Noll slept till late into the afternoon, awoke heavy, and loafed aimlessly about his room, hoping to do some work before the dusk fell; but ideas were shy of him, and, as the afternoon wore on, he grew ever more restless. Flinging into an armchair, he opened the book of the wisdom of Schopenhauer which tells of the Refuge from the brutalities of Life in Works of Art—in the contemplation of the Beautiful. And he steeped himself in the pessimistic writings until the light failed. At the coming of the darkness he roused, made himself some coffee, lit the lamp, and getting back to his easy-chair he pored over the gospel of Art for Art's sake until midnight.

At midnight he stretched, yawned, and, putting on his cloak and hat, turned out the light, and drifted to the streets again and so to the tavern of *The Golden Sun*.

Hélène was there, at a table, watching the door for his coming. A pretty flush warmed her pale cheeks as she saw him enter and scan the place for sign of her. She beckoned him to the empty chair beside her—and he went.

The handsome young Englishman, virile, frank, gentle in his strength, fascinated her. His attitude towards her interested her, a little piqued her, flattered her, baffled her. All the shafts of her country's wit against the amourousless habits of his people tickled her to the smiling point; yet she suspected that behind the self-confident eyes strong passions lurked. . . . She herself thrilled at his touch, would have flung herself upon him, clung to him—would gladly have yielded body or soul to him—yet she saw that he was in no mood for her surrender. She was burnt, fevered, with the eagerness of reckless passion. Yet his frank liking for her, his friendliness, his charming desire to hear always her criticism of life and of art and of things, his pretty homage and deference to her intellectual point of view, won her to him in a pleasant comradeship that gave new life to her. She had heard of these friendships with men—but Paris had never before offered her such sweets. She would watch him with curious eyes that were lit with a smile when he turned to look upon her.

So it came that Noll drifted away from the boisterous community of the students and their nightly riot, and took to haunting the tavern of *The Golden Sun*—drifted from his blithe companions in all their irresponsible rollicking gaiety of youth and fell into the drab habits of these shiftless folk who put artistry and the beautiful before life.

By day he slept ; and when he did not sleep he pored over this Schopenhauer's scheme of evading all thought of the misery of living in the contemplation of the Beautiful—at night he lived it.

Time passed.

The first freshness wore off.

Youth became restless.

The contemplation of the beautiful, in works of art, was no deliverance from the striving of the desire to live. Even in enjoying the beauty of craftsmanship the struggle for life and the cruel facts of life could only be put out of one's thoughts but for a very little while ; nay, art even pointed to life ; nay, more, this very art is in its essence the emotional statement of nature and of life ! . . . Fool ! Life that was beautiful to contemplate in its parts could not be wholly ugly in the living.

Youth rubbed awakening eyes.

Art as a refuge from life was a failure.

He looked round at these faded wits about him.

This devotion to beauty of craftsmanship, to mere letters, to paint, to music, to technical achievement—it could only bring passing consolation of delight. It did not, it could not bring perfect rest—absolute contentment. Sordid hours had still to be lived—and, God ! what sordid hours !

Even whilst they spoke the half-truth that Craft must and should always be beautiful, must aim at perfection of statement, be pleasant, give delight—poor souls—their wan eyes could not wholly put from them that Craft is but the tool of Art ; and Art is the expression of all the emotions and sensations—ranges the whole gamut of life, good and bad, ugly and beautiful, tragedy and comedy. Art therefore inspires or it debases ; and thus and so stimulates life to fulfil itself—or not to fulfil. Art is good or it is bad—is as powerful for bad as for good—good when it enlarges life ; bad when it narrows life. The emotions discover for us far more vasty continents than the eyes of voyagers shall ever behold.

Youth awoke.

These people about him were Failures—the pallid ghosts of men and women.

They were taken up with the shadow.

Could this delight in the mere craftsmanship of art be enough ? Was this sufficient end ? Was it for this the world had been evolved, to this that was set the vast music of the spheres ? To this end—to be set down beautifully in man's handwriting—that the thunders brought the lightnings to the riven oak, that the wondrous mystic seasons took their courses, that the waters leaped hissing to the tornado's smite, that the angry majesty of the resounding heavens gave place to exultant sunshine and serenest

peace ! Were these things so, but to be set down in man's scrap-albums ?

Was delight in craftsmanship enough to live for ?

Tush ! this was absolute, if subtle, suicide—self-killing of the body and intellect and conscience and will and energy. This sipping at the mere pleasantnesses of life—it was emaciating them in mind, body, will, senses.

Their very loves were a dandified make-believe. The kiss of a woman's mouth was become but a passing pleasure. All these shabby little adulteries were without desire for the child beyond—the child when it came was an unlooked-for inconsequence, a burden, a thing of shame. The sweetest thing in life an affair of accident—to be feared—flinched from !

Life might be a tragedy. These were making of it a melancholy and a ghastly farce.

Noll got up from his place and slipped from the smoke-befogged room amidst the clamorous din of applause that greeted the recital of an Ode in Envy of One who had died Young.

He went out into the night.

And as he stepped out into the darkness the bitter cold gripped him by the throat and cut into his lungs. He drew his collar about his neck, thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and tramped down dingy streets that echoed his footfall along their haunted ways—he thought with a pang of the threadbare coats of these pallid revellers in the beautiful. It was the black hour that goes before the coming of the daybreak ; and blacker than the blackness of the night loomed the great bulk of the cathedral of Notre Dame, its towers lost in the reek of the bleak heavens above—there were lights that showed low down and beyond—the lights of the Morgue were not yet burnt out.

The youth stood on the bridge and peered at the sighing sound that told of the river below ; but his brows were knit upon the destiny of these kindly gentle people he had left behind him.

Where was this sorry tragedy of art for art's sake hurrying these sinking wits ?

Those dark shadows that slept under the bridges, were they the husks of such human things ? Was that the end ? To share the dank shelter with the rats that made their litter there ! Or perhaps in the black waters icy oblivion would solve their sorry problem of evading the tragedy of living ! The Morgue.

Nay, how they clung to this despised life, for all its sordidness, for all its misery—even the Failures !

CHAPTER LXXVI

Wherein our Hero sets Foot upon the Road to Rome

Midnight did not see Noll at the tavern of *The Golden Sun.*

He had failed to find deliverance from the tyranny of living in the contemplation of the Beautiful—in Art for Art's sake.

Still obsessed with the misery and cruelty of the world, he sat beside his lamp and opened the fourth book of the wisdom of Schopenhauer, whose fearless brain had compelled upon him the tragedy of existence ; had promised to show him the way out—two ways. One had failed.

He now turned eagerly to the other and the steeper road. He climbed the rugged path of Asceticism.

The will urged always to Life, but——

Life was a sordid tragedy.

Why consent to take part in it ?

Why indeed ? asked scowling Schopenhauer. No man who has seen through the torment of existence, who has grasped the fact of the eternal unsatisfied Want, who has realized the brutalities and the cruelties that are the very conditions of Life, can desire anything but Quiescence—and complete quiescence only comes with Death. The Buddhist and the primitive Christian had done right—both of them. The Buddhist had looked to Nirvana, a state of Nothingness, of eternal calm—the primitive Christian, with the lure of a vague future bliss before his eyes, finding life on earth a designed brutality, had looked on the life of this world as a pitiful thing, and fixed his hopes on the gateway of Death to bring him into the garden of eternal peace. The pessimism of the East had had the seeing eye.

Death is the eternal sleep. And it may be met half way, in bouts of contemplation upon Art. But—better—it may be met almost the whole way. Until the will wholly cease in death, its eager impulses, its insistent urgings to self-preservation, self-aggrandisement, may be baulked and rendered futile by deliberately opposing them. In asceticism the eager desires of life could be almost wholly baulked. Through asceticism alone could one refuse to be an accomplice in this designed crime of living—this preying of life upon life. No wonder the medieval churches had gripped the imagination of man ! The child need not be born

to continue the brutal struggle for life. The ascetic monk and virginal nun sternly refuse to hand on this miserable heritage to further generations. Across the design of life stood the monk and nun; their stern order—thou shalt not.

Through a great and profound pity for the suffering and the weak and the losers in the brutal struggle for life, one could oppose one's self to the cruel order of things. In this sympathy and pity alone could we raise a foundation of ethics that could demand justice against the design—which opposed itself to the triumphant brutality of the life's struggle. In this great human pity for the down-trodden could one not only find alleviation for the misery of the world, but in it also could we find some balm for the criminal fact of our very existence.

The road came out upon the pilgrim's way. The pessimistic conception of life led to the very gates of Rome.

For days Noll haunted the great aisles of the cathedral of Notre Dame—sat within the beautiful interiors of the old medieval churches of Paris—dreamed—brooded over the problem of the Refuge from Life—was thrilled with the thought that the lowly and the meek should inherit the earth. . . .

Amidst the fragrant scent of the swinging incense, to the pathetic sob of the haunting chant, in the emotional atmosphere of prayer, the great pity for all created things welled in his heart and roused in him a passionate desire to be at grips with the cruelty of life.

The mystic rites, the emblems, the symbolism of every act of this splendid church—these things held the youth fascinated, drew him, called to him.

That a vague, all-seeing, all-creating, all-powerful God, sitting apart somewhere in the blue, had created the worlds out of His omnipotence, had designed this scheme of life that the religious condemned, had designed it from the beginning, and was carrying out phase by phase every detail of it, and was angry with much of the result of His own handiwork—all this was thoroughly atune with the pessimistic conception of things. All these brutalities, were they of God's deliberate design? Well, there they were. If there had been design, then they were a part.

And this being so, the churches had done right to set aside the wrath of this Being, and, instead, to appeal to a redeemer—one who had put himself against the brutalities of this design—who had flung down his life to mitigate the brutalities. It was clear that the salvation from such life was thus to oppose that life—was to be found only in asceticism.

The big-browed scowling German had led the brooding youth into the great mysterious precincts of the medieval church, and left him there—it was his last word. And the youth, his ears ecstatically alert to catch the whispers in the reverberant gloom of its sonorous architecture, was overwhelmed with the majesty of the great denial that is the heart of this ancient church.

And everything in his temperament urged thereto.

Art moved him thitherwards—what he conceived to be art.

The Papist faith is that subtlest, most fascinating form of art for art's sake—religion for religion's sake. From the years it has taken boldly all symbolism that rouses the emotions of its own significance—from its pagan altars to the saying of prayers by rote. Whatever of outward pomp and majesty all other worship has known, whatever of mysticism and of craftsmanship and of artistry all other worship has known, this splendid church has taken into itself. It had seized the great pessimistic solace that is a passing refuge from life in the contemplation of works of art. And now, here, too, was a church built to its foundations on the rock of asceticism—on the bold denial of the majesty of life—on the pessimistic, final, and only refuge from the desire for that fulness of experience, from that life that its God had thrust upon it.

And it was so well-bred—everything in its place—everything foreseen. It had an air. The music was sonorous, significant, eloquent, mystic. The arts had given of their best. The pathos of the voices that chanted the sad litanies that condemned life filled him with a sense of the sorrow of the world. He lingered in this atmosphere until he was worn out—he came home late at night, weary and famished with his ecstatic fastings, and, having eaten the meanest food, he would seat himself by the lamp and pore over the mystic volumes. He steeped himself in the books of Saint Teresa and others to which he had heard reference made.

Slowly the monastic spell cast its glamour over his intellect. Once he had accepted the world as a place of suffering and a punishment, the ascetics filled his imagination—the nuns and priests "athirst for sorrow, drunk with self-sacrifice," who bury themselves in cloisters or go into life-banishment beyond the outermost pales of civilization. His great pity for the suffering of the world drew his bowed regard to the cloistered orders, the Carmelites and the poor Clares who are chosen by the Christ as victims of expiation, who unite together and gladly accept for their agony the expiation of the temptations of the world outside—who go to the deepest suffering, the prevention of sin by "substitution," taking the place of them that are too weak to withstand the passions, and taking that place only by going through the full urgings of such passions. Saint Teresa who took the temptations of the soul of a priest who had not the strength to endure them; Sister Catherine Emmerich who took the bodily pains of the sick; Ludwine who "lusted for bodily suffering and was greedy for wounds," the "reaper of punishments," he brooded with envy upon the self-inflicted tortures of the Benedictine nuns of the Blessed Sacrament, their austere day, their rising at two in the night to chant, summer and winter, their turns before the tapers of reparation and the altar. He thought of all these orders vowed to obedience, absolute and without reserve—the complete surrender to the superior, of their life, their movements, their actions, their will, their judgment, their bodies, their instincts, their emotions. And when he dwelt upon the contemplative orders, buried alive in their monasteries and convents, he was overwhelmed. These

people had mastered the whole gamut of the conquest over the desires of life. . . .

The monastic orders passed before him in sombre pageant. The black robe of Saint Benedict—had not his order kept learning alive ? until learning was become dangerous. These men, clad in sombre sable, had been amongst the gentlemen of the world—and its scholars. The contemplative Carthusian, the ascetic Cistercian, the gentle Franciscan. The Jesuit, byword of subtlety and finesse and trickery—it is true he had walked in crooked ways to his goal, but he had had this wondrous church for goal. . . . The Dominican—no, he shrank back from the accursed white robe of him that had stood before the inquisitorial fires and the like tortures of his hellish devising, holding the sullied crucifix of the great-souled Christ to the agonized eyes of the writhing victims of his foul lust for cruelties. To save from the brutalities of life by inflicting harsher brutalities—this had been to plumb the criminal deeps of filthiness. . . .

Yes, he had his hesitations, the youth.

His mind misgave him a little at the conceits and fooleries and the indifferent yawnings of the choristers, at the absent-minded recital of prayers uttered by the often weary priesthood, at the beadles' sharp eye on the fees. It misgave him still more when he thought upon the death in life which the nuns of the contemplative orders set themselves—when he learnt that the age of twenty-nine was a terrible period for the young woman to pass, that their worst punishment was endured in those hours of agony in the passionate regret for maternity when the barren womb revolts—when he learnt that some nuns, killed by the torpor of the cloisters, languish and die suddenly like the flames of candles blown out by the wind. Nay, he clutched his throat in sudden loathing and disgust and anger as he read Saint Teresa's order in her *Way of Perfection*, that the nun who shall be guilty of insubordination should at once and for life be imprisoned in her cell.

Yet——

Contemplation, prayer, pity, self-repression, asceticism ! The strenuous urging of life did not find a loophole there through which to enter in, with disturbing energetic breath and organic instincts and the jumping blood of adventure. And if these things secured the refuge from the cruel struggle of living, why not accept the whole of the rest, the formalities, the etiquette, the infallibility of its pontiffs, the real presence in the wafer in the priest's mouth, the confession to the priesthood, the surrender of the body and of the intellect and of the will and the conscience to the Church that " orders the body to be silent and the soul to suffer," and holds that " true life begins not at birth but at death " ?

CHAPTER LXXVII

Wherein Foul Things are Plotted with some Glamour of Romance

It was in this mental ferment that, one day, idly seating himself at the table where Betty had wrought, and brooding there, Noll put out his hand to one of the small brass knobs of the writing-table, and opened a little drawer. It was fragrant with the atmosphere of freshness and life and sweetness which was a part of her winsome being. It brought the witchery of her brown hair to him, her dainty ways, the beautiful firm gentle hands, the white skin that flushed so easily, the eager loyal lips, the courageous will, the happy eyes, the cheerfulness and gaiety of her glad young womanhood.

In the opened drawer lay what looked like the final proofs of the chapter of a book—or had she torn the pages from some magazine ?

He read the Fragment from The Masterfolk : which ran :

" Rid thyself of the pessimistic error that confuses Life with Lust, The duel between the lust of the emotions and the contemplation of Reason is but in the seeming, as the right hand is against the left. The emotions and the reason but hedge in the highway of thy wayfaring to guide the instincts of life along the way to the highest fulfilment. Joy urges life forward to the achieving ; pain turns aside from danger ; and the reason is the eye of the emotions. Bereft of reason, the emotions are blind ; and the blind in soul are not of the Masterfolk.

Good and evil are not at duel ; these twain are not rigid and separate realities taking sides in a quarrel of the universe ; good is the way by which life travels to the achieving of the highest experience ; evil is that way by which life falls away from the achieving.

There is no other good nor evil. . . ."

When Noll laid down the Fragment of The Masterfolk, the evening was well spent.

He went to the window and gazed down through the damp night upon the smoke and flare of Paris that steamed in the reek. His mind turned to the busy world at his feet. . . .

As he pulled on his coat, he noticed that there were two volumes in the pockets. He laughed. They were the wisdom of Schopen-

hauer—of the refuge from life in art and of the refuge from life in asceticism.

He left them there.

"Tush!" said he—"as if life were given to be evaded!"

He put on his cloak and hat, and walked down into the streets.

As he turned into the great boulevards, the people were swarming out of the theatres, their eyes still smiling at the comedies. There was the shuffle of feet, and hum of conversation, and laughter that punctuated genial waggeries. Bright cafés were crowded inside and out with the ranks and array of chattering people.

He went under an awning and seated himself in a back row; the waiter at his call brought him a foaming tankard of beer. And he sat and sipped and brooded there alone in the midst of the buzzing of the pleasure-hive.

Paris flashed and flamed in the night—that brightly lighted Paris of many lamps that lies between the crazy heights of Montmartre to the north and the students' quarter beyond the river to the south—the great central world of Paris, that is the ordinary workaday pleasure-seeking-at-the-end-o'-the-day's-work world that knows little and cares less for the fantastic aspirations and the mockeries of the hill of martyrs, or the artistic aims of the left bank. Here stepped the good citizen of the gayest when not saddest people of the world, in the streets that are his public drawing-room, smiling at life, strutting with wife or mistress his evening stroll, before getting off to his virtuous or unvirtuous bed, living his life by habit and rote, taking it as it comes, turning reflective eyes upon it never. In the highways the great painted omnibuses rumbled past, taking up swarms of home-going folk from their sauntering evening pleasures of the town. The white-hatted and black-hatted hackney coachmen cracked loud whips and urged their nags to the winning of their last fares for the night. Here strolled the sturdy everyday folk, respectable and commonplace and prolific and jovial, who went to their churches of a Sunday or did not go, as their forefathers before them, and for much the same reason of confirmed habit, asked no questions, but came into their religion or lack of it, and of their concept of life, by heredity; even as their hair grew, and they waked and sleeped. Here were no brows troubled with nerve-racking introspection. Anxieties were on far other scores. The women, with skirts held up, frankly showed ankles that were not aimlessly stockinged, and dressed their shapely bodies frankly trusting the men liked it so; here the men turned and as frankly admired them. . . . Here the world passed and repassed, gaily and genially human. Most had never heard of Shakespeare, few had read him; to nearly all, Homer was as dead as higher mathematics; to most, Dante would have been an intolerable bore; to many, Milton a giver of sleep. Nay, Molière was known to these as master of dull French, that had wearied their school-day youth. . . . Here were soldiers that slammed steel scabbards upon the flags, and police that yawned because the world must be respectable.

A stout burgess, his plump wife upon his arm, came and took seats at the little table beside Noll.

"Jean has the commercial flare," said he, blowing mightily and mopping a perspiring forehead with florid handkerchief. "He has won marbles on a system."

There was raising of admiring hands at the child's promise. Madame sighed—to think the boy springing up. . . . There was a pause, and memories of the child's arms about her neck—her eyes filled with tears—and she spoke of the cares so happily borne—the days that were gone came back to her.

"Yvonne had fancied a piece of lace to go with her white gown and veil for her confirmation." The good dame laughed lightly. "Ah, she herself had worn it—mon Dieu! how many years ago?"

He pinched her ear.

She bore her old age well, he said; still, he himself was absolutely ancient—nearly forty!

And they both laughed.

The good man smoked a cigarette; she flipped through an illustrated paper; they sipped liqueurs; called the waiter at last; paid the reckoning; exchanged a jest or so, and departed, he lifting his hat to the house.

Others came and went.

Noll brooded on.

What had been all the frantic ecstasy of art for art's sake to the world at large? An absolute nothing. And what was this ascetic hatred of life?

The aim of life is not to live in poet's rhyme—nor does our neighbour pass feverish nights fearful of losing immortality. The poet may be shaken with such fears for his verse; the ambitious may see in dreams their names writ in flashing jewels on the face of time, glittering like stars beyond their daily lusting; but the man of the street scratches his poll to no such questionings. He has to live. He asks, and he has the right to ask, that he may live his life in hope and happiness and all becoming jollity. There will be rough stones enough beneath his feet, walk he ever so nicely. Why be jealous of worldly fame? The names and fames of the ancient masters of the world, king and conqueror, are vanished—their very gods have taken wing. There are some chipped relics—the rest is in the spindrift of time. . . .

What was all this abstract pity of the world? what did it affect? What was it but the conceit of sheer egoism?

In the darkness beyond the flare of the café, on the benches that skirted the roadway, sat several shabby fellows—frayed, down-at-heels, haggard. Their pale faces stared out of the darkness at the festive loungers along the café's front. Out of the gloom their hungry eyes sullenly followed the shifting figures that passed to and fro across the golden flare of the brightly lighted place. The younger ones scowled, brooding pensively—one now and then muttering a rough jest to the others. But they were mostly silent. The elder, dirtier, and more ragged, with hands deep-

thrust into pockets of filthy trousers, shrugged stooped shoulders, and watched the shifting comedy that passed unwittingly before their eyes. A tattered fellow from amongst them would rise and pick up a cigarette-end that fell upon the pavement from light discarding fingers.

The ranks of chairs along the café's front began to empty.

Noll roused, called to the waiter, paid him, and strolled into the night. . . .

The waiters came out and cleared away the tables and chairs and put up the shutters.

The lights went out.

The faces that had stared out of the night sank on to drowsy chests, and the wastrels of the boulevards fell asleep on their hard benches.

One fellow amongst them arose, yawned, and drowsily shuffled down the road to a bench that was not so crowded; he lay down upon it, and fell asleep.

He had scarcely fallen into a drowse when a dim slouching figure came out of the black drizzle that was setting in, and, hesitating near him, peered into his face—put out his hand and touched the sleeping man upon the shoulder:

"Comrade," said he, "it's going to be a wet night. This is wretched shelter for a master mind."

The other roused, uttered an oath, laughed grimly:

"What is it?" he asked.

"Gavroche," said the stooping man in a hoarse whisper—"the mists are rising from the river." He looked up and down the road cautiously: "There's a drunken carter has lost his way and is wandering on the quays. Perhaps he would have fallen into the river anyway."

Gavroche roused and sat up:

"Ay," said he, "he has been paid his wage or would not be drunk. . . . And he is near the river. . . . What a death, my comrade, to go out of the world with a full skin! . . . Some rogues have all the luck. . . . Come."

CHAPTER LXXVIII

Wherein our Hero scatters some Pages of the Indifferent Wisdom of the Ages to the even more Indifferent Gulls

In the black night, Noll stood on the bridge at the end of the Boule Miche. The cathedral loomed sombrely amid the darkness.

But the darkness was resonant with the promise of a mighty music.

The youth had awakened.

A load was fallen from him.

The mists were rising from his soul. He stooped in his eagerness and peered at the years.

He began to see the Reality of things. He was filled with a strange excitement. He went back in fancy, and picked up the thread of the unravelling of life where it had dropped from his fingers in his eagerness to follow Schopenhauer's inert nerveless guidance.

The scowling genius of the German had nearly found the truth —that a mighty desire for life was at the core of all existence. And here had slipped the mighty intellect; and the crabbed hands, groping in the half-darkness, missing the little, had missed the all, since that which stirs at the heart of all things is not a will to live, but life—life with an overwhelming urging to fulfil its fullest self. Nay, urging so overwhelming that, to know the fullest life, it lightly takes the risks of death in the achieving.

The bitter lips, not given to understatements, had yet understated the whole case. He of the surly shoulders had gone before the youth, beckoning him, until they were stepping along the hard stony ways of unhandsome half-truths that wounded the feet, and straying in the dirty alleys where the refuse is shot, their attention fixed on the cruelties, seeing only the shabby side of life. And, for solace, the worthy German could point but to two ways out of the shabbiness of his destiny—art and asceticism.

But this was not life at all.

The youth awaked to find the highway of life to be clean and healthy and glorious and beautiful. He stepped back upon it. Up aloft and afar and hard by, the world sang with the joy of life; and the motherhood of the world held out immaculate arms to him. He stood at gaze with life, and he saw that it was not

misery; nay, so far from being compact of misery, life lay before him unutterably sweet, thrillingly magnificent; so pleasant that we do not notice the delight of sheer living until misery knocks at our doors to say the order of our career is broken.

Life is to be lived, not baulked—otherwise we give the godhood within us the lie.

There is no virtue in a doleful countenance, nor aught more sacred in solemnity than in delight.

For Joy is serious as sorrow; comedy serious as Tragedy; life serious as Death.

It came to the youth, standing there in the reek of the night, that he was on the brink of manhood; he faced the prospect; and the whisper of the Masterfolk came to him where he stood.

His intellect and his emotions were in a strange thrill—leaping with a new and pulsing energy. Dawning manhood plucked at his sleeve, pointing to life, staring inquisitive glances, rousing him with restless innuendo—took him by the shoulder and said: "Awake, thou hast done with drifting, thou must live, and guide thy life, and choose thy ways."

He began to regard life as a drama in which he was now a player, an important player. He was no longer of the audience—he was compelled on to the stage. He suddenly became aware of this. No matter how ill-dressed for the part, no matter how slipshod, no matter how stammering his tongue, how dull his art, how ill-prepared to speak his lines, he must answer the call, must play that part. He roused to the fear that he did not know his part—did not know his cues, did not know even what was expected of him. He must search out the book of the play. What a strange tragi-comedy it was!

Tshah! pessimism's refuges from life were but coward's shrinkings from the exultant thunders of the universe.

Life is life, whether it be lived in the full, with the full breath of the heavens in the nostrils, and facing the dangers foot to foot and striving and overcoming, or whether its energy be spent in a vast labour to avoid it through exquisite evasions. Life cannot be avoided, whether a man take all the risks and fall in the risk, or, like the contemplative Grey, stand midst the whispering grasses of a graveyard and sigh the years away.

The august and splendid old cathedral loomed out of the mŭrk.

And yonder towers that thus rose above the flood! The medieval church that builded them had founded itself on this pessimistic denial of the fulness of life: contemning, spurning the present; yearning for a vague, fantastic immortality. Its litanies, its prayers, its services sounded the misery of life. To the medieval churches this strenuous world was to produce for its highest ideal the barren man and woman, scowling on life in a narrow cell, shutting out the splendour of living, denying it wholly, apologizing to its God that others dared to live the life He had given, praying passionately that the sin of this life that God had given might be taken upon their own poor shoulders! The free air of heaven, and love, and the joy of life, were things to be

looked upon askance and with caution, as a part of God's bungling ; yet so vast their faith they chanted their misereres all unwitting of the thing they said, all unwitting of the fear lest the future life, to which yearned their distorted hopes, might not be as sorry a world of blunders as that which they branded with their disapproval as God's failure in this present seeming !

And where does the medieval church stand ?

The master peoples pass its gates.

They preached the humble and the lowly ; they preached the prince of peace—their hands, their doors, their traditions, their magnificent altars are bespattered with blood. With sonorous chant and opulent prayer and incense and significant symbolism of the worship of non-resistance, they blest the standards of battle. They tortured kings of thought, banned the demigods of the imagination, robbing woman of her parallel dignity with man, benumbing her wits, sapping her vitality, stultifying her will, made her a gaping hypocrisy—such women cannot be the mothers of the Masterfolk.

Pah ! these very stones reeked with the blood of that Eve of St. Bartholomew. The doors of this church were scarlet with crime. Up yonder in the haze across the river hung the bell that had sounded in Christ's name the cut-throat command to slay all such as worshipped not after her fashion.

Asceticism is like the will of one who, fearful of the dangers of the sea, fearful to go out on horseback to his wayfarings in the adventures of living, fearful of tragedies that may lurk in every thicket, became so fearful of the accidents that beset life in the living that he shut himself up in a strong castle, its rigid walls hewn from hardest stone—feared even to marry a wife lest she, wearying for another less fearful than he, should put poison in his cup. And the ship went sailing over the sea, and the horseman went riding over the hills, and the woman married her lover and knew life and became a laughing mother of babes, and—the castle fell into the earthquake's maw. . .

To such like strange music jig they who suffer the itch of Asceticism's distorted ideals—hermaphroditic, nay, wholly neuter. Virginity, the fantastic virtue of virtues ! They come to find life's glorification in the supreme denial of life—the chaste nun, she who stands with frantic eyes at issue with her godhood that says to her : " This is the sure and exquisite music of thy life-song ; this is thy office this ; for this thy sweet body, thy fragrant breasts ; thy every urging is touched with the finger of delicious shame that thou shouldst know with no common thrill the majesty of thy overwhelming significance—Be thou the mother of children."

Nay, does not the Ascetic even approve the ridiculous lie called Illegitimacy ? As though a child shall be illegitimate ! As though a woman shall find shame in realizing her godhood ! They that strive to be barren, alone, are the illegitimate.

Nay, had not the ancient churches even raised to solemn dignity of sainthood one Anthony, whose ridiculous virtue was the dread

of the love of woman ! for which the high God within him had chiefly builded him.

Wiser far, for all their grey and vasty faults, had been the sturdy old Protesters, rude, clumsy, bungling enough though they were—those wise rough men who had emptied abbey and priory of hermaphroditic ideals so that the monkish cell had given place to the family hearth, and the clatter and whisper of inordinate litanies to the laughter and shout of little children.

For the Masterfolk have no fear—neither of birth, nor of life, nor of death.

Noll took the books of the wisdom of Schopenhauer out of his pockets, and flung them from him into the river below—the pages fluttered, beating the air, and the books that tell of the Refuge from life in the contemplation of the Beautiful and in Asceticism, fell upon the messy flood and were borne along on the polluted waters of the city that went, bubbling filth, to cleanse themselves in the immensity of the mighty deep.

And as the books fell, they struck the body of a dead carter that passed in the darkness upon the tide.

There was law—how otherwise the evolving of the Masterfolk ? There were the heights. How to reach them ?

The grey towers of the cathedral took solid shape ; and, beyond and low down, the coming dawn flushed up from afar, and the smoky heavens lifted and grew light ; the vague world arose into palpable form ; and the day gained possession of the steamy city.

There was a footfall on the dank quays. The bohemians were creeping home to their dingy beds to sleep away the day, turning life upside down, making day into night, night into day—drab symbol of their misconception of the realities.

CHAPTER LXXIX

Wherein the Honourable Rupert Greppel shows Hidalgic

In a large shed in the workmen's quarter, on a platform, under the flare of gas-jets high hung in the dim rafters of the great place, there sat three men at a table ; and before them, languid and self-possessed, his frock-coat close-buttoned and his scented being attired in the general air and pose of the dandy, stood a man of pale countenance, who, with the calm measured accents that are the habit of self-possession, spoke to the upturned faces of a dark mass of men that swept in a vast attentive hush from before his feet.

He spoke with facile precision of thought and accent, holding himself easily, airily, and with picturesque insolence. There was in the air with which he spoke a quiet indifference as to whether he pleased his hearers or not which had something of that strange distinction that marked everything this man did or said—for Rupert Greppel, whatever his faults, had a conspicuous and sincere belief in his own dignity. He stood there calmly hidalgic, swaggering, self-reliant. He never forgot, nor allowed others to forget, that his mother was a French countess, and of the oldest of the old noblesse.

He was speaking the last words of an academic appeal to aristocratic anarchy as the solution of the great human problem. He treated with contempt the aspirations and the beliefs in all socialistic ideals, laughed at the good of the largest number. The masses did not even believe in themselves, said he. The strong man, strong in himself and of the breed of those that had belief in themselves through the habit of generations of tyranny and of rule, was alone fit to govern——

"Down with all aristocrats !" cried an ugly-looking fellow at the back of the great seething mass of listening humanity.

Rupert Greppel never so much as frowned. A little smile played about his eyepits and lips. And he was greeted with a storm of counter-cheers from a group of students and friends, amongst whom sat Myre and Noll and others.

"You cannot put out the aristocrat with the breath of a mere shout," said he calmly. "What does the State know of justice or of equity ? There is one law for the strong and one for the weak —and there always will be."

There was some laughter ; and again counter-cheers.

" The State is the triumph of the individual over his fellows, rank by rank, until the poorer spirits labour for the free spirits. Tush ! when you have a strike in this so-called Republic, the troops are used for those that are in the right, hein ?" He laughed. " I tell you they are drawn up to strike for those that are in power. And they are right. The commonweal demands the public good. I am not for it. I demand rather to play gaily with this life that is mine, as if it were mine, not this one's, nor another's—I demand to play it like a gentleman, with dignity, elegantly, artistically, free to serve my own sweet will, lusting when I will, with whom I will, reading pleasant literature when I would rest my body, sleeping when I would, strutting it abroad with my clothes well-fitting, enjoying life, and looking well-dressed for the part—I am aristocrat. As for the people let them be as happy as they may, consistently with toil—let them have bread and amusement on occasion—let them prate of the humanities—but do not rack their grey minds with books. Shut the muddling schools to them. Do not harass their vague minds and make them pale with thinking. We can do all that for them. Let them be industrious and well-behaved. Thought and the riot of living are only for the aristocrat. These things but give the people a gross headache. The peasant has stolen our acres ; the burgess has bought our strongholds. And is the world gayer ? Is it cleaner in conduct ? Is it stronger in men ? I say the world is for the aristocrat—and the aristocrat has fallen from the days when, the stag being long in the finding, we hunted a lean peasant instead. The aristocrat being dethroned, the Jew holds all France in his fat and grubbing hands. Is France more splendid than it was ? But one thing they have not been able to buy—our countenance. They still have our contempt. And we yet hold the reins of the glorious lordship of war. We still know how to die. And until we die, when we walk abroad let the people see to it that they give us the cleanest place if we condescend to walk the same pavement. . . . But the dirty rogues encroach. The dirty rabble ape our very vices. The people to-day have even the impertinence to be bored—boredom is the privilege of the aristocrat. They would leave us nothing."

Amidst the laughter and the applause that rose above the swell of the ugly growl which was the sullen voice of the great crowd before him, he descended from the platform.

A restless silence fell upon the place.

But the massed crowd burst into a roar as a man leaped on to the platform and stepped forward before the people—a rough workman, energetic, vigorous, alert, dirty. This was one of those half-educated men of action, bred by the academic unrest of the literary anarchists—bred by the egoists, Nietzsche and other dainty-fingered gentlemanly persons enough, who would have been alarmed to think that their theories were breeding such volcanoes. Into his blood had eaten their academic trifling with extreme individualism—his fanatic eyes glowed at the very

thought of his fingers about the throat of the rich—and, innately criminal by every instinct, his nerves leaped at the murderous impulse when he found logic was with him in his histrionic dreams of killing.

The picture-loving eyes of the world are caught by the theatric glamour of the unflinching courage that sent out the debonnair and scented gentlemen of Versailles, beribboned and careless, to face, with clouded canes for sole weapon, the blood-dripping and weaponed mob of the Revolution—the romantic pulse of the grey world is thrilled at the grim tale of the exquisites who continued their games of cards and dice, regardless of the interruption of rude history and with all the elaborate etiquette and fantastic ceremony of their accustomed habit, until the command came from rough lips that it was the turn of each to step into the jolting tumbrils that lumbered to the scaffold and the guillotine. And indeed theirs was a splendid feminine defensive courage, that dreaded only the indecencies. But courage is not the privilege of a class—the sombre garb of the workman holds often enough habitual acts of courage, persistent and grim as that which on occasion sets the poets rhyming if it be shown by a prince of the blood ; and it covers thereby a more virile danger, if roused to it, of turning aggressive hands to the rectifying of its grievances, injustices, and years of sullenly borne insolences. And if the rousing be done by a master wit, what vast significance may be there? or what ghastly catastrophe ?

This fellow swung back his head to speak—and a shout greeted him from the back of the great hall, where some ugly-looking fellows stood :

" Gavroche !" cried they—" silence for Gavroche !"

The greeting touched the man's conceit, and he smiled. He laughed :

" That scented fellow is not without eyes," said he ; and a shout of laughter greeted him.

His eyes settled on his theme ; and when the silence came he burst roughly into his harangue :

" Neitzsche has spoken the last word," said he. " Man has arrived above the world's shambles by struggle alone—he is the fittest to survive. There is no other law. The strongest shall succeed. Existence is an anarchy ; and they alone have rights who make them. Yet man, forsooth, arriving at the top of things by mastery, decides Nature to be brutal, forgets that he is where he is by the ruthless selection of the fittest, and being arrived at supremacy in Nature, he thinks to hold Nature back by overthrowing her supreme law—he refuses to let the weak go to the wall, refuses to leave the sick to die, hangs the strong man who slays the weakling, and flouts the very nature which put him atop of the brutalities to bestride the world ! But Nature is not to be flouted. She proceeds, with contempt of all opposition, to evolve the ultimate over-man, the Beyond-Man—the healthy, strong, ruthless, vigorous overlord. Man is the most splendid brute—at the base of him is the scarlet lust of war. The cultured and the

effete and the timid quake, frightened at the vision of the Beyond-Man, not daring to acknowledge that the ruthless survive. And to what do they appeal? to art and civilization and religion. Well! these be pleasant toys—but in what manner have these things been of use to make man stronger, better equipped for the ruthless struggle for mastery, and to produce a more ruthless breed? The day and life of the whole modern state is a lie—it swarms with churches, mouths its creed of loving your neighbour as yourself. But what are its *acts?* I tell you it is moved by an aristocratic morality—a code which has no slightest intention of loving his neighbour. There is no democracy—men are not equal, but wholly unequal. But there is cheer for you, my comrades of the corduroy breeches—you of the hard hands and the vigorous life. The Beyond-Man is not of the nerveless race of puppet kings, indeed what hath a king to-day but his robes and his fallals and his fineries? The Beyond-Man is not of the enervated crowd of hereditary nobles—like that scented apparition that has just spoken. He is not the fat-bellied flabby burgess, grown soft behind a counter. He is of the master-wits amongst the workers—men whose bodies are hardened by toil, whose vigour is a live thing from the habit of a strenuous life. It is our turn." He paused, and added hoarsely: "Up, then, and change the face of the world! Up and seize the good things the gods dangle before your eyes for the seizing. Take them as these others have taken them—by sinew and strength of arm. Pluck from kings their magnificence—not to give it to the aristocracy whom feudalism created lords paramount to usurp kingship—not to the smug burgess whom you enfranchised with your blood at the Revolution—nay, the nobles were more picturesque and not a whit more brutal than the trader, for the sweating-dens are many and each hath a thousand victims for one that knew the rack, each den more populous than the Bastille! Pluck their riches from the burgess and hang him where he hanged the nobles—the lamp-post is still an emblem of civilization. And if you fail a time or so, do the prison and the frozen road of winter leave your belly more empty than the humanitarian State? Has the felon's cell a harder task than such as many a worker lives in the *free air*—God help us—the free air of this Rien-publique! Danger is the strong man's plaything—the whetstone of mastery. Vive l'Anarchie!"

He stepped forward as he ended his fierce apostrophe, and shouted it hoarsely:

"Vive l'Anarchie!"

The great throats of the workmen flung back the cry with a mighty shout; and the students cried applause, setting their canes rapping upon the floor.

The cheers set Gavroche's conceit jigging. He stood, his heavy face glowing in the down-flung light. The shadows played about his eyepits and high cheek-bones and broad nostrils and heavy chin, and ran down the deep throat; and the light revealed the strong jaw of the man who carries out his contentions.

But even as he stood, a big man arose in the midst of the bohemians and students, and said in loud clear accents :

" Thou fool !"

The students shouted with laughter ; and the mood of the workmen changed, as a Frenchman's quick subtle mind will change at a ridiculous situation. The vast crowd burst into merriment.

Gavroche came down the platform, and suddenly lost the command of himself that had given him a strange dignity during his oration—he gave way to wild gesticulation and his voice rose to a shrill scream, and at once became as the ravings of a maniac to the judgment of the vast multitude. Loss of temper lost him the ear of the house.

The big man, Eustace Lovegood, remained standing in calm self-reliance — a dignity that appeals always to the essential dignity that lies beneath the wits of all workers.

One of the solemn Three at the table leaned forward, rang a bell, and asked the pleasure of the house ; and when the din had ceased he called out to the big man to go up and speak—Gavroche, said he, had had his say and must go down.

Gavroche, recovering his calm, shrugged his shoulders and descending from the platform made his way to a group of workmen at the back of the hall—as Lovegood worked his way up to the tribune. . . .

" Come, comrades," growled Gavroche to his fellows—" pass the word—this fellow will speak for a full hour—he is like to be on the side of the moralities—and they require some explaining. We can be back here soon after. Slip away and meet by the broken river-lamp. The watchword is *Rien-publique*—and the countersign *Beyond-man.*"

As Lovegood made his huge way to the platform, there also left the hall the engrossed figure of Quogge Myre. A great idea had come to him.

CHAPTER LXXX

Which treats of the Masterfolk

THE big man faced the people, and squaring his great shoulders he threw back his cloak and gazed solemnly down upon them :

" That is a fool," he said, " yet he spoke much truth."

There was a shout of laughter, and some mock cries of " Vive l'Anarchie !"

" It is perfectly true that they, who are the fittest, survive in the mighty struggle for life. The supreme law of life is the Survival of the Best. The best are the fittest. But mark the law : it is not the individual that survives, but the race. Thus, hadst thou been the most exclusive aristocrat of apes, tracing thy lineage to thy uttermost jibbering beginnings in the ooze, thou hadst still gone under the heel of the most bucolic community of men, though, ape to man thou hadst had the greater body's strength, the deeper egoism, the harder wish to slay.

Dominion goes to the race ; it is mightier to be of the commonweal of the Masterfolk than to hold the king's baubles over weaklings. To be sure, he that is king of a little people *is* a king —of an Insignificance. But they that are the companions of the Masterfolk are lords of a commonwealth that hath set its heel upon the neck of him who rules so small a parish.

The Masterfolk have not their eyes upon whence they came, but on whither they go.

This Gavroche fellow speaks of strength as if there were only brute strength.

The Masterfolk must be free to live the fullest life.

To be free, the Masterfolk must be strong of thew. But this is not enough. If strength of body made the overlord, then the lion had been overlord to man, and the negro overborne the white man. But man's brain wrought the knit brotherhood of the clan and weapons and wondrous defence and the science of war. So the brain's strength came to be above the body's strength.

The Masterfolk, to be free, must be free in their thinking. Yet it is not enough. For the strong man may have in body a giant's strength, and in thinking a giant's strength, but, foot to foot with them that are of his own strength, he goes down before the overlordship of them that are strong in conduct ; for he that hath not

self-discipline, who debaucheth his powers and maketh license of his body's gifts and loosely scattereth his brain's will, falls to disease of his faculties, and his nerve grows weak, and the will, which is the centre of life, grows enfeebled and melts to water, so that he arouses ill-will and contempt amongst his companions; and the enmity of his fellows blotteth him out, and his body rots. Nature, the silent judge, sets the seal of her obliteration upon them that she hath rejected, so that they shall not further increase in power.

The Masterfolk to be free must be strong in conduct. Yet again this is not enough. For the strong man to be free must be strong of will. Yet even this is not enough; for the will that acteth against the conscience becomes a bully's strength and will reel before it finish.

Through the conscience shall each man receive purification in his search, which has been the eternal search, for the godhead within him that leads to the fullest life. Therefore the Masterfolk to be free must be strong in conscience—for instinct is at the mystic centre of life. Yet even to be spiritually free is not enough.

For the spirit cannot live but through the body. Therefore the Masterfolk must be strong alike in all the freedoms—for in each is the foundation of the other, and in the failure of each is the obliteration of the other. Strong and alert in body, and in thinking, and in will, and in conduct, and in conscience.

That man cannot be wholly free who shall ignore any of these freedoms." . .

CHAPTER LXXXI

Wherein the Widow Snacheur comes into her Fortune

The chill murk that swept up the narrow cobbled street in the pitchy night, swishing long wreathes of fog across the rare lamplight, told that the river lay close at hand.

It was a bitter night ; and the winds buffeted out of unseen blacknesses and squealed in a riot of unkindnesses, smiting the face of things and falling away sullenly to smite again ; the dingy alley creaked with the complainings of shutters and lamps that strained and jolted in their rusty hinges and grumbled in their iron sockets.

A group of ill-looking fellows that whispered on the kerb under a wall-lamp showed shadowy dark and nearly as intangible and dim in the murky gloom as the ghostly shadows that the few flickering lamps sent stealthily creeping across the narrow cobbled way to join other shadows where lurked the vindictive gusts about the edges of the moaning blackness.

A lilt of song and the clack of brisk footsteps came down the alley.

The muttering group under the lamp turned towards the sound ; their anxious ears caught the refrain of one of Aristide Bruant's obscene prison songs ; relief showed on the coarse faces.

" Here comes Gavroche," said one.

And Gavroche came.

He glanced sharply at them all.

His was the master spirit ; yet none of these men were easily given to obedience.

He laughed :

" It is as I thought," said he. " Comrade Hiéne is pale—his hand perspires—hold out your hand, Hiéne."

The sullen young giant put out his great hand, palm upwards, and it smoked in the keen air of the night.

They all turned and stared at the tall lank youth, and his sullen face had an ugly look, though it was of the pallor of death.

" I have drawn the lot to strike," he said, scowling. " I have never killed—and I do not like it——"

Gavroche laughed :

" Afraid to kill—even an old woman !" he sneered.

A dark look came to Hiéne's sombre eyes :

" And yet not afraid," said he. " But ashamed—to kill an old woman. . . . There is a scoundrel I know that I am not afraid to kill."

Gavroche shrugged his shoulders :

" And this for an Overman ! . . . Tshah !" He turned to the others : " I had foreseen this," he said. " I will do the masterwork." And he added with contempt : " He shall stand at the door where the girl sleeps—for the old fool locks up the girl at night—but the moment we leave, this fellow that fears to kill a woman must unlock the door. Suspicion will fall on the girl." He turned again to the scowling Hiéne. " Hast thou the courage to throw suspicion, comrade ?" he sneered.

The sullen young workman made no sign.

One of the others moved uneasily :

" Good comrades must not quarrel," said he.

Gavroche laughed :

" We must forestall danger," he said.

Gavroche turned to the pale young giant :

" Mark you, comrade," said he—" if the girl rouse, thou must into the room and—kill." . . . He smiled evilly. " It is all we ask of thee."

Suddenly he stepped close up to him :

" By thunder !" said he—" I think this fellow is too weak a fool for men's work. We had best leave him out."

The huge young fellow met his regard unflinching, with pale set face :

" Where Gavroche goes to-night I go," said he—" if he and I hang for it. But I do no killing."

There was a long silence between the two men. .

Gavroche shrugged his shoulders ; turned on his heels : " We need have no fear, comrades ; the Republic will slit his neck otherwise," said he. " Come."

The widow Snacheur rose from her chair, looked stealthily about her, lit a second candle-end, and went a-tiptoe to the door of the girl's room. She listened, cautiously turned the handle of the door to see that the lock held, and returned to her table.

She changed her seat so that she could see, from where she sat, the door into the maid's room.

She brought out a bag of loose silver from a pocket in her petticoat, poured the contents upon a piece of felt to prevent its making a noise, and counting it into tens she made the money up into rolls with some scraps of newspaper.

There was a strange look upon her withered wizened features in the doing—it might once have been a smile, it was now something between suspicion and greed and satisfaction. The gaunt fingers counted the rolls.

Thou poor fool ! what avails thee now, or has ever availed, or shall ever avail to thy life's enrichment, this avid culture of thy sordid isolated self ? Hast thou found life in gathering gold, or

in thy wilful cruelties to the weak, or in hate as a carpet to thy mean wayfaring, or in the lip's protruded contempt upon thee in thy walks abroad ? God ! to spend thy nine and seventy years upon *this* journey and upon *this* travail !

Hearest thou no stealthy fumblings at the locks of thy outer door ? Thy gold then hath not kept thee the alert hearing in thy ears, nor won thee the willing service of the hearing of others ! And that poor half-famished slave-girl of thine, with her fifteen years crying out for bread, she, whom thou didst sting with thy bitter coward tongue but this morning—she sleeps in her chill room, heavy with the fatigue of thy overtaxings put upon a frail ill-nourished body ; she lies mute with the numbing weariness of hunger—how shall *she* serve thee with the watch-dog ear of affection to guard thee from harm ?

There is a stealthy hand at thy door, and the latchet turns slowly within the wards of thy locks.

A messenger stands without, and his summons none may question—thou must needs make thy further journeyings without thy dingy hoard, without purse or scrip, by thy lank lean shivering self—alone.

Ay, at last thy ears warn !

For a moment the old woman turned, and gazed with eyes of terror at the coming of sudden death—and her tongue went dry in her mouth—no sound. At the next there fell the weighted sand-bag swung by Gavroche's skilled hand of villainy, aimed by his murderous eyes, and struck the ancient skull, sending the old woman's life jigging into the shabby room and out into the void ; and at the stroke the body, half-risen from the chair, fell across the table amongst her moneys, sprawled ungainly midst the coins before it further fell, and sideways lurched in a dead huddle upon the floor.

To the door of the sleeping girl stepped Hiéne, and stood, tall, slouching, pallid of countenance. And he so stood whilst they all searched stealthily every nook and cranny of the room.

Gavroche rose from his stooping survey of the fallen woman, and glanced at a little mirror he held in his hand. There was no damp of breath upon it.

" That is the end of *her* romance," said he.

He laughed low. He was a man that loved his joke.

He signed to the others to bring their plunder ; and as they came empty-handed except for papers, he uttered a harsh dog's laugh that showed embarrassment.

Save for the silver that lay about, the rest was the scrip of the widow's investments ! Of considerable value, but—useless—dangerous to them.

" Curse it !" said Gavroche. " She had a banking account."

There was a low whistle from the fellow who barred the entrance at the outer door.

" Quick !" said Gavroche. " Pocket what there is of money, and we will divide later."

He turned to Hiéne, where he stood before the door of the sleeping girl :

" And you," said he—" unlock that door, carefully."

Hiéne scowled sullenly, standing pale in the candle's guttering light ; and they saw that he held a revolver in his hand :

" Comrades," said he—" I am the last to go—and this door remains locked."

Gavroche shrugged his shoulders :

" It does not matter overmuch," he said.

Hiéne smiled grimly.

Gavroche moved towards the open door :

" Come, comrades," he said airily, putting aside a scowl that had threatened—" we must be going. That jabbering moralist over the water must be nearing the end of his garrulous harangue. We had better all be seen there."

When they had all gone, Hiéne let himself out of the door into the courtyard, and stealthily closed the gate into the street.

The door into the girl's room remained locked. . . .

And it was so found in the early morning when the police broke into the place, led by the curious concierge, and roused the sleeping girl.

CHAPTER LXXXII

Wherein Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre struts airily towards the Goal of Freedom

Mr. Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre climbed the stairs to his rooms at midnight ; and all that night he wrote.

When the grey of the dawn put out his lamp's light, that wondrous misspending energy of his had finished the essay that brought him such an uproar of notoriety and made him for awhile again the pet of London drawing-rooms.

It was a master-stroke.

It accounted æsthetically, the Nietzschian note, for his past infamies ; it gave the philosophic standpoint to the latest and shabbiest infamy he was about to commit—for the first bound copy of his new book lay upon the table, fresh from the publisher. He smiled as he thought of the green eyes of Gabrielle Solignac reading this book, reclining in her catlike grace amongst her little smiling Eastern gods.

It was scarce a couple of months since he had read a volume of Nietzsche. It had set his brain on fire. It was a revelation—of his own possibilities. Here suddenly was revelation that his instincts had been masterly—that he had no need for shame. With his accustomed industry, he had forthwith mastered the whole of Nietzsche's published work—our Quogge was a gluttonous reader.

Here was a philosophy that overthrew the whole of the accepted ethics and morals of society—overturned the whole conception of conduct. It made of Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre a splendid hero—whom himself in his inner man even he had more than suspected to be a rather scurvy fellow. His conceit and his egoism jumped with this gospel. He foresaw that the vogue of this aristocratic anarchism must soon spread into England—the decaying hereditary aristocracy would leap at any straw, and here for place of straw was a glittering argosy laden with thrones of gold and purple, and carrying a gaudy diadem for them all. It had begun to thrill the youth of Germany and France. He decided to forestall it in England.

His great chance had come.

There must be no moment's delay.

That night he had heard a French workman spout it. A workman !

There was indeed no time to be lost.

His book would be in the hands of the reviewers to-day—it would be publicly sold in a fortnight's time. This new philosophy robbed its publication of all baseness. It would read as if he had had the courage of his outlook upon life.

He rubbed his cold hands together. . . .

He brushed his untidy colourless hair off his forehead and read the clean copy of his essay carefully through—altered a line or two—and folded it with a covering letter to his friend Harry Pollis, the egregious editor of a great London Review, begging urgent publication. There was just time to catch the post. He arose, went out into the early morning, and posted it. Myre's feet never lagged in his duty to his only god.

When he returned to his room he looked at himself in the great mirror over the low mantel, rubbed his hands, and smiled.

These two things would make a sensation !

He stood and gazed at himself. He took a hand-mirror and looked at himself from every point of view.

He wondered if a head like his could not be the front of one as great as Shakespeare—he wondered whether he looked like a man who could top the world.

It worried him.

He posed so as to see the back of his head and the side-face, to see which of the great men of the past he might be most like. . . . He could find no sign to guide his destiny. But his gloom was suddenly relieved. His conceit saved him.

He smiled a large smile.

It came to him with a rush that he was wholly original.

He lit a cigarette, posed himself in his gorgeous dressing-gown before the mirror again, and smirked upon a pleasant prospect.

He dreamed of exquisite sensations.

He saw himself sitting in the smartest drawing-rooms, holding himself with delightful insolence, giving voice to anarchistic destruction of all the moralities. Art for art's sake would be nothing to this. He had once thought of going over to Rome —but every mediocrity went over to Rome nowadays ; it had become positively banal—the extremity of commonplace. The very suburbs did it ! People were not even barred for it. You went as to a dentist. . . . God ! how he would frighten the editors—and the women !

It was time, too, that he was done with France. Indeed, Mr. Quogge Myre, who had so sworn by the French intellect and French art, who had so flouted the vulgarity of the English nation of shopkeepers, found that there were now so many crossing the Channel to Paris that he realized they were discovering and exploiting the sources of his originality.

He looked in the mirror. There was no slightest doubt about it, he was becoming puffy, middle-aged, just a *leetle* bourgeois ! He wondered if he had always looked rather a common fellow.

Tush ! he had been surrendering to the bourgeois ideals—he had married !

Well, the last Clatter about him had run down. He must start another.

Yes, he must strike quickly in England—or they would be discovering this Nietzsche for themselves.

Some days after Mr. Myre's notorious book appeared, he walked into a café frequented by literary men ; and he saw that his coming produced a sensation.

He went up to a table where Aubrey sat with Noll and Rupert Greppel and Lord Montagu Askew and others ; and putting his hand on Aubrey's shoulder he said airily :

" This book will give my lady her freedom."

He flung the volume upon the table, and called for a bock of beer with carefully rehearsed calm.

Noll took up the book, *She Whom I Once Loved*, and skimmed through the recital, shamelessly and brutally detailed, of this conceited fellow's relations with women. They were of every class. . . .

" Rather vivid !" said Noll, after Myre had yawed away an hour of time. And he added drily : " Yes ; you'll get your divorce."

" It's rather daring, I flatter myself," said Mr. Myre. " We lack an English Casanova."

Noll rose from his seat ; flung down the volume :

" Faugh !" said he ; and kicked it into the street, took up his cigarette from the table, flicked the ash from it, and left the place.

Myre's face was livid with anger.

The Honourable Rupert Greppel said :

" There'll be blood spilt over this."

Gaston Latour, who sat at a table near by, laughed immoderately.

The proceedings for divorce were begun in the French Courts that day. The silent woman with the green eyes was swift when she decided.

She took her freedom.

The book had a considerable vogue.

CHAPTER LXXXIII

Which Essays the High Epic Note

The day on which Mr. Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre got his freedom in the divorce-courts of France, he received a challenge from a hot young blood called Solignac, first cousin to Gabrielle.

Gaston Latour entered the room, grimly solemn in the conventional frock-coat and trim dress of the man of fashion, and holding a shining silk hat in his hand. He was very careful of the silk hat—he had borrowed it. It had the flattest brim he could find in Paris.

He was followed by another solemn youth. They marched in, clicked their heels together, bowed, and presented the letter that held the invitation to face death at daybreak. It was all done with a charm of manner devoid of all offence, and a desire to be referred to two of Mr. Myre's "friends."

Mr. Myre read the letter; and, as he read, his face became more like the hue of badly-made paste.

He was a long time reading it, Gaston Latour's sleepy eyes never leaving him.

He burst into a harsh laugh, and flung the letter into the air:

"A challenge, eh? . . . ha-ha! ho-ho-ho! . . . Tell your cousin, Monsieur Latour, that the duel is relegated to the limbo of opera-bouffe. Ho-ho-ho! We do not do these things in England."

He prepared himself for a flight of oratory.

Gaston Latour nudged the other youth—they bowed solemnly and withdrew.

"Ho-ho! ha-ha-ha!" laughed Quogge Myre.

The following morning Mr. Quilliam O'Flaherty Macloughlin Myre's name was posted in every club in Paris, and struck from the list of those to which he had belonged; so it came about that he had to live his day at cafés.

And it was as he stood at a table, giving authoritative utterance with loud yawing voice to a group of youths that sat about him, vowing that he had determined to shake the dust of Paris from off his splay feet and to start a great renaissance of the

English drama, when a handsome young woman, sister to Gaston Latour, entered the place, walked straight up to Mr. Myre, and struck him a sounding buffet on the ear that sent his hat flying from his head.

Quilliam O'Flaherty stooping down in confusion to search for the hat, she kicked him violently behind.

There was a roar of laughter from the students seated round about, and they tapped the handles of their knives upon the tables, singing :

" Opera-bouffe, bouffe, bouffe ! Opera-bouffe, bouffe, bouffe ! Hey-hey-hey ! bouffe-bouffe-bouffe !"

Then the girl flogged Quilliam with a horse-whip, thrice :

Once for France.

Once for womanhood.

And once because she liked it.

The whip whistled.

It was said that he had been seen to strike at her—but she parried the blow with her left, and countered between his eyes with the butt-end of the whip—which was loaded.

He fell.

It was homeric.

It was at this stage, so the scandal went, that he scrambled under a table ; but she lugged at his collar to get him out ; and as he clung to the leg of the table she gripped him by the moustache so that she pulled off one side of it.

But she herself owned this to be as inartistic as it was unintentional, stamping her foot with annoyance at the mischance. Indeed, she apologized most handsomely ; for, said she, pathetically, when she had got it she did not know what to do with it.

It was an anticlimax.

She threw down the whip and said he might now go home.

He now went home.

There is little reason to doubt that the horsewhipping by Gaston Latour's sister hastened Mr. Myre's desire to start the great renaissance of the English drama.

As he stood before the mirror in his rooms at his hotel and shaved off the remains of his drooping moustache by the candle's light, and soothed the aching bumps that were risen upon his face, he sniffed loudly through a swollen nose—he had very tender places—and decided to go to Rouen until the hair grew.

CHAPTER LXXXIV

Which has to do with Blue Blood and a Jade-handled Cane

THE duel got upon the town.

Rupert Greppel, strutting with hidalgic air, was concerned in bringing about several affairs. No one was hurt. There was much braying of asses.

The Lord Montagu Askew, dainty, foppish, in the mode, and the Honourable Rupert Greppel, hidalgic, head in air, stood before a shop window in the Rue de la Paix and gazed at their splendid reflections ; whilst past them moved on the pavement or whirled by in barouches the great world of Paris—*hig-lif* sunning its butterfly wings, honey-questing, sipping at any dew that the gods left lying abroad.

Montagu Askew held his jade-handled cane mincingly, and he glowed with a gentleman-like glow, for his dove-coloured little book of poems tinted all the bookstalls.

More than one woman of high rank this morning had stopped her carriage to congratulate him on the exquisite lyric wherein the vast firmament at break of dawn was likened to the grey of a woman's glove—indeed, it became the vogue of the drawing-rooms —people sang it.

As a fact, Montagu Askew was acknowledged lord of chamber music. Indeed, in his slender careful verse was no rude hint of the full-blooded Rabelaisian love of life ; it was innocent of the suggestion of a large emotion ; he played upon the accepted measures and the well-authenticated rhyme ; he startled with no surprises ; he sounded no new note—Montagu never forgot he was a gentleman. Not for him the uncouthness to fling open loud-clanging gates to a new world. He was pretty and serenely mannered before everything, disdainful of them that skipped a foot to the hot jigging blood, or such as showed a strong disdain ; nor was he wanting in contempt for the natural emotions. When he condescended to so low an act as to seek nature, he walked through the well-groomed spaces of the world, well-trimmed parks at the outside, where an elaborate etiquette had made the rules even for the trees to grow in seemliness with a most gentlemanly existence. For him were no disturbing peerings into

human destiny—he raised no rough alarms by strenuous aims and vigorous thinking. Pretty, dandified, he—always. Sinning easily enough, but always like a gentleman. Never a crudity. As a perfumed fan fluttered by jewelled slender fingers, blowing cool fragrant airs that kiss the painted cheek of some frail beauty, he uttered his lines—obscene often, but by the most gentlemanly of innuendoes. The unmannerly thing was the only sin. The display of a profound emotion was the depth of ill-breeding. So sang he, tunefully always, guiltless of all rough accent of originality; sang of peacocks and green carnations and blue roses, of butterflies and pools and dragonflies and souls, of ivory and silver, and of dawn and dusk and dew, and white shoulders sweet, beauties who moved languidly with rustle of silk—so wafted he to you nothing more vibrant than whisper of women and scent of perfumed chambers and flowers and bowers and rose and amarynth and asphodel and daffodil, of moonlight and music and kiss and gavotte and little tiny things—and always in the most gentlemanly manner. He milked the unicorn. Always a would-be suggestion of mysterious deep-hid symbolism that ended where it began, and at most only the dark hint of well-bred tragedy.

He moved impatiently now, as impatiently as he might, complaining that the shop-window into which he deigned to cast his reflection was tinted with amethyst.

"Come, Greppel," said he—"let us gaze at ourselves in another window—this is an ageing colour."

Then came the terrible tragedy of a fire at a charity bazaar; a most patrician function with much upper clergy in it was smitten with sudden and awful death. Montagu Askew was in the business. He was one of the few that came out alive.

In the rush of the distraught ladies, princesses, duchesses, maids, to the sole outlet of the seething hell, Montagu Askew got caught near the door—frantic hands of terrified women clutched at him for help—he was almost within reach of the free air—could see the sunlight a few paces before him—a frightened girl clung to his arm in the awful crush, then another—women's skirts got under foot as they made for the door, and they went down. He tried to shake himself clear of the two girls, he was a little slender man. . . . The heat was hellish. . . . One of the girls tripped on her skirt and fell, clinging to him. He beat her down with the jade-handled cane—fought his way blindly through the rush of women for the door—stood at last out in the sunlight.

Some coachmen were dashing into the fiery furnace, lifting up and bringing out fainting women, whose muslin skirts were in flames.

But Monty Askew was frightened.

He smoothed his ruffled dress and went home.

Montagu Askew, entering a café with Rupert Greppel one evening, saluted Noll Baddlesmere, where he stood amongst a group of students; and a silence fell upon the place.

Noll nodded :

" That's a handsome cane, Askew," said he—" though they tell me the women have a poor opinion of it."

Askew's little gloved hands trembled, and he turned white with anger—as pale as Montagu Askew allowed himself to turn :

" It has belonged to my forefathers for seven generations," he said—" and every man of them backed his acts with his sword."

Noll laughed ; shrugged his shoulders :

" If your acts are hereditary, it is an excuse for you," he said.

The following morning, Rupert Greppel and a French cousin called upon Noll ; and Rupert stiffly asked if he could refer him to two friends.

" No," said Noll—Doome was with him—" no—I do not associate with men who associate with Lord Montagu Askew."

Rupert Greppel paused, dumbfounded :

" I do not think you understand," he said. " Lord Montagu Askew challenges you to fight him."

" Tell Lord Montagu Askew from me," said Noll, " that I only brawl with men. Good-morning."

The whisperings at the clubs are said to have hit Lord Montagu Askew harder than a pistol-bullet ; but Lord Montagu, from lack of experience, is not an authority on being hit with pistol-bullets. He never takes part in ungentlemanly encounters where people are hit. Indeed, he maintains a wondrous silence, except that he challenged Noll ; and the jade-handled cane has joined the ancestors.

CHAPTER LXXXV

Wherein a Man of the World commits the Indiscretion of putting his Experiences into Writing

"Dear Noll," writes Horace Malahide about this time, "I have a son. He speaks English as yet with a strong foreign accent—but lack of experience may have more than something to do with it. If you come, I'll let you play with him.

I live in a whirl of tangled emotions in these days.

T'other evening I went home, to my father's marble halls, to seek the old gentleman on an affair of hot urgency. It was in the long hours. I lost some temper—the butler being a sphinx of ducal know-nothingness—so I rang up the housekeeper. Yes, she knew where a telegram would find Sir Pompey if I would leave it with her.

I!

Leave it!

Gods! said I, am I utterly disinherit?

Forthwith the heir of this branch of the Malahides demanded the address.

It lay at St. John's Wood!

I nodded 'That will do' to the twain, and dismissed them; and, they being dismissed, I whistled long.

Naughty old gentleman! . . .

The next morning Pa did not return. Mid-day passed. Evening stole on. . . . The dusk saw me descend at the doors of the address in St. John's Wood from mine hansom cab.

I must preach the decencies; thus I, strengthening the intention as I rang.

'Sir Pompey Malahide is here,' said I sternly to the smart maid that opened the door.

'Yes, sir,' said she.

'I desire to see my father,' said I, and marched boldly towards the furious racket that filled the room near at hand—the paternal roar distinctly discernible, bassoonlike as though he cried small coal.

I flung open the door—burst upon the riot——

On the floor lay the Byronic Bartholomew Doome with three children rolling over him—three, no less!—another in his arms—

Sir Pompey Malahide, my father, on all fours, pretending to be a she-bear, his coat-tails over his head, shaking a foot-stool in his teeth, and growling like an ass in pain—and seated on the immaculate waistcoat of the dark mysterious Bartholomew the most beautiful young woman I have ever seen. The din infernal —and Pa the worst part of the din.

'What does this mean, Pa?' cried I.

They gathered themselves up, shamelessly — laughed — ye gods, twittingly, at *me!* Wholly unabashed, Pa, shaking himself into comfort in his clothes, slapped me upon the back:

'Horace, my son——'

'Don't be familiar, Sir Pompey,' said I. 'You are speaking to the heir to a baronetcy.'

The baronet laughed vulgarly:

'Mrs. Bartholomew Doome,' he said—'allow me to introduce to you Horace, my son—at least, my reputed son.'

Bows, chassées, and greetings.

'Horace—the Misses Doome, Master Horace Doome, and Master Oliver Doome——'

The old gentleman slapped me upon the back again with mighty hand that near drove me down amongst the fire-irons.

He dug me in the ribs:

'The rogue's been married this seven years,' cried he; 'and now he's signed the deeds as partner in Malahide and Son, and you're just in the nick of time, the fool of a lawyer is upstairs—only—look here, Horace, you must, like Doome, sign a bond not to touch the business arrangements—you and he would wreck the counting-house in six months. . . .'

Doome took an early opportunity to draw me aside and to whisper to me the grave disappointment it must be to all who respected him if they should discover the real Don Juan, begged me not to expose him, and pointed out the serious loss of prestige he must suffer in the eyes of the British Public; so we sat down together on a sofa and pitied him for his decencies.

Luddy, luddy! how the homely virtues will persist!

The idol of our youth, the dark, mysteriously wicked man—with feet of honest clay and a clean simple heart after all! Even prolific, and——

Well, damn romance, say I. . . .

Oh, and more!

Even the gods fall out—drift apart.

Aubrey and the O'Myre go different ways—Aubrey in pain that O'Myre has now discovered that there is no great work of art without a moral purpose—Aubrey holding that Aubrey himself is sufficient purpose. He, Aubrey, avers that he has found himself —nothing matters after that. He must back to Paris. There the women have secular lips and voices of brocade and understand being loved. Tiens! He will in future give his splendid talents to attack the Philistinic brutality of strength and the barbarity of the over-rated glory in mere outdoor delight that to-day holds England in poisonous embrace; in all the pride of effeminacy he

withdraws into the palace of his Egoism, where he is lord—back to Paris—*there* are mirrors, where he may reflect upon himself, take himself up by the roots and dwell upon his own image !

I expect he will come back to us occasionally to see what he looks like.

The egregious O'Myre also hath descended on London town —stays, however, but a little while——

Yet a wondrous thing of a man, the O'Myre—the most consistent surely of all created things—always wrong. He and *The Times*. He must have been suckled on half-truths, and nurtured on the Irish Bull; he now browses on false conclusions. But with what an air ! Nevertheless, he has it all on the most philosophic basis—has for ever been blaming something for his lack of greatness. It now appears the English drama is dead. The O'Myre will breathe new life into it.

Meanwhile, he has laid it down, like a minor god with a throaty tenor voice, that scenery destroys the illusion of the drama—therefore it comes about to-day that if you would be in the vogue with the ladies you must go in state not to the play, but to the dress rehearsal—the bare theatre and the dinginess being alone at back, the low tone and the cobwebs and the like giving mystery to the spoken word that requires for enunciation but beautiful lips. God ! how the ducks quack !

Thus mews he much monstrous wisdom, sitting like a pale emotional maggot upon the apple of discord that is called the modern drama." . . .

The rest of the letter is a matter of affection and goodwill. A man is always ridiculous about his first-born—exaggerative, egotistical. As though he had invented the business. Whereas, like heredity, immortality, and the latest fashion, it is thrust upon us.

CHAPTER LXXXVI

Wherein our Hero, and Another, go Home

The sunlight that had painted the white face of Paris with a hundred hues all day had given place to a gentle drizzle as the twilight fell; and the steady downpour had driven Noll into a restaurant which he was not in the habit of frequenting; it had kept him there in its bright rooms until he knew every face and every trick of gesture of the people who sat about him.

The night was well advanced when he sallied out into the light rain; turning up his collar, he strode homewards.

He paid small heed to the rain; and as he turned out of the well-washed street into the courtyard where he had his lodging, and climbed the stairs to his room, he scarcely noticed that he was wet.

The rustle of women's petticoats was in his ears, and when he walked abroad in these days he was aglow with the sense of the warm regard of women's eyes, that glanced upon him from the dark shadows of rakish hats; the walk and movement of women found a rhythmic echo in his thinking. The warmth of the coming summer was in his blood. His instincts were jigging to the dancing measure of the season.

As he flung off his wet clothes he was seized with a whim to go to the tavern of *The Golden Sun;* and he decided to humour the whim.

He lit a candle and flipped through a book until it was close on midnight. But he was restless—and he arose eagerly when it was time to go. . . .

As Noll, reaching the bottom step, fumbled at the door that led into the tavern of *The Golden Sun*, a young woman in black came languidly down the stairs, and he held the door open for her to pass in.

The light fell on the delicate features of Madelaine. She smiled with pleasure, seeing him.

They entered and stood together—a song was being sung—and as the last chords were struck, she slipped her hand within his arm; and he left it there. She shared the cordial greeting that Noll received from the faded poets and frequenters of the place. She

was very beautiful—but her face pathetically pale. Noll noticed a dizzy tendency to cling to his arm, as though she feared to fall. He found a table, and made her sit down beside him.

"Madelaine," said he—"you look as if you wanted food."

She sighed sadly:

"Ah, yes—for years," she said.

He called for a drink and some biscuits for her; and whilst they were being brought, he asked her:

"What became of you, Madelaine—after the old widow Snacheur was killed?"

She sighed sadly:

"I went to work in a millinery shop." She shrugged her slender shoulders. "They starved me too," she said—"just like the widow Snacheur. So——"

She slipped her hand through his arm, laid her head against his shoulder, and smiled:

"But do not let us think of these things—it is so warm here."

The touch of the affectionate hands, the childlike caress of the girl, the confidence and the clinging of her warm body to him, thrilled him. She was in all the fresh beauty of her young womanhood; and the simple black gown, threadbare and worn as it was, only enhanced the beauty of her skin and pronounced the delicacy of her colour and the richness of her splendid hair.

The girl increased the restlessness that had possessed the youth all day. She brought to him the sweet whiteness and the subtle grace of Betty—filled his senses with the atmosphere of the handsome girl who had filled all his dreams from boyhood. It brought to him the most importunate craving of man, the love of woman.

Noll sat brooding for awhile. Yet even in the vigorous lust of life that held his young years, even as he sat there in the thrill of his sweetest memories, he vaguely felt the gentle presence of these simple faded artistic folk about him; and he realized how indelibly the word Failure was written across them all. The coats were, if anything, more faded; the shoes more worn; the eyes alone lit up with the wonted glow of delight in art. A little praise was their rich barmecidal feast.

The greybeards, and the youths, and those between, they were all still hoping to create the masterpiece—there was not, amongst them all, energy enough to create more than the delicate measure of a gust of chamber-music.

A burst of applause followed the recital of a poem.

Noll roused with a start:

"Come, Madelaine," said he—"this heavy air is making you faint. Come with me and we'll have some supper."

She gathered her skirts with wonted grace of gesture and took his arm; and they made their way out of the room almost unnoticed.

As the doors closed on them, she turned in the dim ill-lit passage, drew down his face to her between her two hands, and kissed him.

She clung to him:

"Thou must give me a bed too," she whispered hoarsely; "I have no bed."

She was trembling.

"You are tired, Madelaine," he said.

She nodded:

"I have had no sleep for three nights."

"What have you been doing?" he asked.

"I walked about the streets," she answered simply.

"Come," he said, "we must first sup."

She gathered up her skirts, and slipped her hand through his arm. They climbed up to the courtyard, and so into the street, and out into the night.

Madelaine sat on the side of the bed and undressed.

It was a sadly simple undressing.

She was languid with sleep.

Noll went and looked out of the window, where Paris lay below him, blinking her thousand eyes. . . .

He roused and went to the bed.

The dark head on the pillow lay very still. The girl was fast asleep.

Noll went back to the window—it was the window from which Horace had gazed down upon the world the night before Noll and Betty had come to Paris.

And as Noll so stood, his brows hard knit upon the problems of his life, the night slowly passed.

The rustle of a woman's skirt had been in his ears all day—in his blood. This girl had brought back to him, of a sudden, the fragrance of his marriage.

And this beautiful winsome girl—what was to be the end?

The very question sobered him.

Suddenly it was as though he had left the din of the noisy thoroughfare of life and had entered the majestic silence of a mighty cathedral; and from the great mysterious deeps a whisper came to his ears, each syllable roundly phrased, clear, unhesitating, a chapter of this strange book of life that he had so lately read—the book that had fired his blood and aroused his energy. The breath of these pages seemed to give him decision and free air, where before he had been drifting aimlessly, going he knew not whither, caring not overmuch. This book had braced him—it was a call to battle. He had had enough of beds of roses and daffodils and idyllic trances. The phrasing of *The Masterfolk* came to him now:

"Nature has ordered that certain things shall be; and to him who disobeys her ordering she is cruelly merciless. She has decreed that he shall be most dominant, shall breed the fittest race, shall know the fullest life, shall achieve the highest destiny, who abides by the woman he loves. And him who is unclean she flings upon the dunghill—him and his seed for ever. Of the love of man for woman, Nature has spoken with no uncertain voice; and Nature's judgment is final. He that fears to love a woman sets

himself against the supreme law of life ; he ends in unnatural vice ; he is against the design of life ; celibacy Nature will none of—for celibacy stultifies life and ends the race. Promiscuous love she condemns utterly and punishes heavily with loathsome disease and with foul decay ; the races of promiscuous love are become of the scum of the earth, and are dying out. Against the love of many women also, once and for all, she has spoken. The peoples of many wives Nature is sweeping into the waste corners of the world. Nature is her own jury—Nature alone her own judge. She hath not said the Masterfolk cannot break from her ordering, but that they shall not. On every breach of her vigorous laws Nature waits with weaponed hand. At the elbow of every vice stands foul-breathed disease.

There is no sin in the love of man and woman. The woman has committed no sin in loving—she has but accepted the overwhelming urging of life. It is her chiefest glory. Man has committed no sin in loving ; his life has ordered it ; and the Masterfolk obey life. It is his chiefest glory. Who so glum a dullard but smiles to see lovers meeting ! But he sins foully who is guilty of the repudiation—foully against the woman, criminally against his race, blasphemously against his godhood, and damnably against his manhood. Such are not of the Masterfolk.

They of the inferior manhood, lacking in the force of character necessary to the full acceptance of the duties of the Masterfolk in love, have not the virile force to abide by a woman of the Masterfolk ; and these come out when the lamps are lit and there are shadows in the land, and skulk about the by-lanes, and commit mean adulteries with frail women, and have the habit of repudiating debt. Such cannot breed the Masterfolk. They shall not. For these cower from the strengthening risks that dog a strenuous life ; they would have the delight of marriage without the courage. . . ."

Noll opened the window.

There came from the street below the hoarse cry of a prostitute.

He went into the room, lit a candle, and sat down at his desk. Everything in the place whispered of Betty this night.

He wrote a letter :

" Dear Madelaine,

I am called home.

I leave my rooms and all in them to your care, knowing that they will be in good hands. I leave you also all the money I can spare, to keep you in decency and comfort until I return.

I shall send, early in the day, for the large leather bag which you will find labelled and ready by the door.

Noll."

And when he had sealed this letter he wrote another :

" Dear Babette,

I hear that you arrived in Paris with Horace yesterday. By the time you get this letter I shall have left my house in the

clouds. Last night I found Madelaine at *The Golden Sun*. She was without home, without means, except the sweating pay of mean industries on which no honest woman can live; she was without a bed. But her blood is dancing with life—not with a desire to cower in sweating-dens. She was drifting. I gave her all these things that I might, last night—and she is now asleep here.

Come to her as soon as you get this, and let her feel that she is not alone. She will babble all her news to you—it will be better for her than babbling it to me.

Tell Horace not to go back to the haunts of his youth. The wine is not nearly so good as we thought it. The illusion is the sweet thing. Don't break the butterfly.

Tell him also that both of you have much of my heart.

Yours,

NOLL.

P.S.—I am tired of myself. I am off to find Betty."

Noll sealed the letter and wrote a third—to the concierge:

"MADAME,

I am called away to England. Mademoiselle Madelaine Le Trouvé has been good enough to take charge of the rooms until madame and myself return. Pray give the enclosed to your little ones 'from the Englishman who knows how to laugh.'

Agréez, etc.,

OLIVER BADDLESMERE."

He stole to where Madelaine slept, and on the chair by her bed he put her letter and some banknotes.

He collected clothes from about the room, packed them into his large leather kit-bag, and carried it to where the candle gave light. From the walls he took down the portraits of Betty and one or two trinkets, and very carefully wrapped them up. They too went into the bag.

He was near singing more than once. The place was astir with the sound of Betty's skirts, the echo of her gaiety, the sound of her light footstep. The air was sweet with the breath of her uncomplaining good-nature.

He shut up the bag, tied a label upon it, put on his cloak and hat, blew out the candle, and softly let himself out of the room.

In the darkness Noll stood upon the bridge at the end of the Boule Miche, the pleasant highway of youth. But he now knew no indecisions.

He realized that his mere intellect had led him into the veriest pedantries—had nearly led him into irretrievable blunders. He saw that man's highest was rooted in the body, that heaven was no fantastic dream, but here and now for the winning on this healthy

brown earth. He had been letting it slip by him, whilst he dreamed of pasteboard nothingnesses.

He realized that the emotion felt was nearer to the centre of life than all thought. He cast from him the devil of mere intellect, and it went out of him demurely into the darkness, like some poor thin-souled nun, who crushes down into barrenness the splendid emotions of the life within her which are her very godhood, in fantastic hope to win an eternity of vague bliss, she who by the very act shows her inability to enjoy bliss—for, heaven and hell and all the eternities shall yield her no such bliss as the dear human loves may do—the æons of immortality shall never bring her the delight that she might know in an hour of a lover's embrace or the dear touch of a nestling child at her lean breasts.

As the awakened youth stood there, the black night passed over the edge of the populous city, and its smoky shadow slowly followed it. The lights of the lamps paled in the dawn ; the stars went out ; and out of the daffodil east the day came up—and there was light in the world.

Before the day was well begun, Noll went home.

* * * * * *

In the still grey dawn, in dripping drizzle, Gavroche the anarchist slouched forth from prison-cell to his harsh doom.

He was dejected.

He missed the band, the public eye, the shouts of the comrades.

What, Gavroche ! this is thy dramatic moment—thou hast the stage all to thy sole swaggering self—and though thou roused at daybreak from thy broodings to lilt a braggart song with all thy best intent to play the reckless swashbuckler, the florid eager pressman can only report that thou didst sing "somewhat palsily."

Tush, man ! Is it thus thou goest to thy end ? Hath thy desire to be Ruthless Overman brought only this about—that thou art to become no better than manure ? Where is now thy dream of Ruthless Overman ? Nay, what avails at all now thy Overmanhood, Gavroche ? does not thy neck feel rather with unpleasant shiver of discomfort the overlordship of the Commonweal ? The aristocrat despised it yesterday, and thou to-day. Hast thou, even thus late, a glimmering that thy vaunted Ruthless Brutality is to be snipped by the might of this Commonweal, thy unspeakable windpipe slit at a stroke of the ordered shear that falls on the bidding of that overwhelming force which is the public good—the

power of that sneered-at race that is to thy silly little individual hand's strength as the might of the sea to the spite of some flab stinging medusa !

Yet, if the insignificance of thy little petty self irk thy conceit at this moment, what of the scented, gloved, and dandified gentlemen who write the anarchic words that have led thy conceit to seek some shabby fame in flinging a bomb amongst innocent people ! What of them whose lyric pens have pointed the way to the Uselessness of the old and sick and far-too-many and superfluous ones ! What of them that go scot-free—whose philosophies led thee to kill the old miser-woman and to slay the drunken carter to thine own Egoism's enrichment ? Tsh ! thou wert but a tool after all, thou with all thy strange gabble of Ruthless Overman, putting to the touch of practice what the gloved gentlemen were content to prate of—Might being Right and the rest.

Well, thou goest to thy dunghill alone—they to their social triumphs. And, when all's said, the aristocratic ideal has brought rich harvests as well as the shearing of necks to its idolaters—and they have had their emotional moments in intervals of starving the race and filching from the poor and from the widow and the fatherless.

Nay, doth not Europe, bereft of protestations, bow, hat in hand, to the Almanach de Gotha ? And the fine gentry therein, weak-knee'd and inbred and ridiculous, do they not claim divine rights and special places reserved in church and the tribute of the Formalities all set and square to their comical little greatnesses ? And multitude of lackeys ! . . . Gods ! are they not even Envied !

Verily, Gavroche, thou hast been lacking in the diplomacies. It is that which has been thy chief offence against thyself. These others bray as loudly—but the accent is more tuneful.

So, the same dawn, the self-same lamp of day, sees us all going each on our so different way.

OF THE BLOSSOMING OF THE TREE OF LIFE

CHAPTER LXXXVII

Which has to do with the Binding of Books in Half-calf and the Whimsies of Calf Love

When Noll had left his baggage in a quiet hotel by the Strand, and had refreshed his body with much splashing of himself in water and a change of clothes, he sallied out into the streets of London in a vague wonder and surprise as to how to begin the search for Betty, yet firmly determined to start straightway in his quest—the Baddlesmere jaw set firm.

The summer afternoon was closing in, and the Strand was gay with people cheerily making their way homewards from work or amusement. But homewards Noll did not take his steps ; he felt a certain sense of shame about going to his own people without Betty at his side—and this, too, not on his own account, but that it seemed disloyal to Betty and likely to make her future entrance into the family circle an embarrassment to her—so sudden was the suddenness with which he had stepped into the realm of his manhood !

The young fellow had been too restless to stay in the dingy mute rooms of the hotel ; he could think it out better in the open—striding to his thinking. It was in the blood—he smiled at the restless walk of Lord Wyntwarde up and down that library, of the strange trick that came out in his mother at times. . . .

Ah, London, thou queen of cities, that filchest for ever the hearts of them that dare to love thee ! Radiant in thy sunshine, fantastic in thy murk, it is when thou puttest on the habit of thy lilac twilight that thou showest all thy majesty—thy tiring maids, the handsomest women of the world, helping thee to thy wondrous mantle of many hues—pale whitenesses and opal greys, beribboned with purple and ultramarine and the sooty tinge of dusky shadows, adorned with diamonds of a hundred flames and wrought through and through with gold and silvery strands, and thus and so, with smoky art, spinning thyself a mystic robe that it is full fit only the Queen of all cities shall wear.

And what a splendid stage, thy realm, to strut it in ! Thy large drama knows no curtain, thy magnificence no boundary but man's narrow sight. Thy whisper and the song of thee, and thy strange melodies, no strings of violins nor the resounding hollows of deep

orchestral 'cellos can yield. From the music of thy ways, where goes thy multitudinous traffic with roll of many wheels, and lurches the gaudy omnibus with reeking horses twain, and lumbers the thundering dray, and winds in and out the teeming welter the quick black hansom seeking the hackney fare, with jigging of horse-bells that sound a catchy measure to the shuffle of many feet, from out thy swarming hive there comes the breath of vigorous life and thinkingness and the atmosphere of quick wits and alert wills that have the habit of decisive action and of dogged enthusiasms.

And the faces that pass, with lingering glance out of the dusk, the pale sweet faces of thy beautiful women and the handsome figures of a vigorous race, how much larger vastnesses are in the communion of these eyes than in wide empty spaces of unthinking continents!

The mystic dusk turns thy many habitations to a thousand shadowy palaces, thy very vulgarities to dulcet musicalities. What comedies are in the making in thy wide hospitable lap to-night! what tragedies! what heroic strivings! what bemeaning indecencies! what crimes!

Thy very mud holds something of dark mysterious lustre—being that which is trod out of thy pageant and thy history.

He only loves thee best who, being divorced from thee, comes to thee again out of the years. He flips thy mantle with no cockney familiarity, but hears in the hollows of his reverent ears the æolian whisperings of thy large significance. . . .

The sound of footsteps ceased to rouse the echoes in the empty street, as Noll came to a halt before Netherby Gomme's doorway. He hesitated for a moment; ran up the steps; and rang the bell.

The smoky twilight that held the place was passing into sooty darkness, turning the staid street of lodging-houses into a way of fairy habitations, the lemon flames of gas-lamps showing a sweeping curve of light down its long length to the far rumble of the city's distant traffic.

A key coughed in its wards as it shot back the bolts of the lock; and the door yawned open.

Noll turned at the sound of its unlatching

The mother of Netherby Gomme stood in the dark hollow of the doorway; and a grim triumph lurked in her eyes.

Noll saluted her, hat in hand; and she returned his greeting with a grave smile of surprise.

"Is Netherby at home, Mrs. Gomme?" he asked.

The grim triumph slipped back to her eyes, and came lurking into the corners of the old mouth again:

"He came home from his honeymoon to-day, Noll," she said—"will you go up and see him?"

Noll walked into the house, and the door was shut behind him with a triumphant slam. He followed the grim old lady into the little sitting-room, and as he went the memory of the queenly figure of the little child Betty as she walked into the dingy room and kissed the jealousy out of this old woman's heart, came back

to him like the fragrance of her sweetness, so that for a while he could not speak what he would have said.

"It was only the other day," she said, "that you were boys together. . . . To me it is only yesterday that he was a—little one—in my—arms." Her eyes filled with tears. "But it is all gone. . . . This passing of youth is as strange as death. . . ." And she added after awhile: "I think he—was glad—to come back."

Something of the light of triumph came stealing back to the old tear-stained face.

"And Julia?" he asked.

"I've sent her out to get tickets for the theatre," she said drily. "They will want amusing badly to-night—and the tuning of the fiddles would always rouse my Netherby. . . . But you'd better go up and see him, Noll—you used to know the way."

Noll made a pause to take breath at the top of the stairs (how he and Betty had raced up those steps!). He pushed open the attic door.

In the midst of the smudgy dusk that filled the room, his head in his hands, elbows on knees, sat the dim figure of Netherby Gomme, sobbing pitifully.

Noll shut the door softly, and went up to the bowed man:

"Good God, Netherby!" said he—"what's this?"

He gripped his hand upon the other's shoulder, affectionately.

Gomme signed him to a seat:

"Sit down, Noll—I'll be all right in a minute." He blew his nose. "No—better still, light the gas. I must stop. Tears will not bring back one's dead, nor grief annul the things that are done. Light up! A man can only cry comfortably in the dark."

Noll struck a light, turned on the tap of the wrought-iron gas-jet; and the gas leaped into flame.

The old attic was gone.

In its place was a picturesque medieval room of quaint nooks and demure corners, with stiff wooden settles of curving line against the wall, and low bookshelves round the rest of the walls; and above, on a deep coloured frieze under the low ceiling, was a long space of rigid trees from the land of Morris, green trees that yielded vasty purple and golden fruits on close-bunched foliage—and in the blue intervals between the stilted trees sailed white-sailed many-coloured galleons and purple triremes—and on the wall beneath the frieze and above the long curves of the low book-shelves was a yellow space splashed with huge orange-coloured dogs, with emerald eyes and scarlet mouths, that leaped along on hind legs to the chasing of each other and an occasional orange stag amidst mighty flowering plants that seemed to whirl in autumn tints with cunning running lines half-flower, half-leaf. And here and there was a knight in armour, and a hawk upon his wrist, and clothes upon his horse, and about him was always written *Soe sirre Gallahydde gotte hyme pryckynge to hys pilgrymmynges;* and when the knight was faded blue the writing was

russet green ; but when the knight was russet green the writing about him was faded blue. And here and there was a lady with hair in plait, and she wove at a loom, and sang with ruddy lips, and the writing about her was *Chaunted the Queene ande weaved hyre tale righte Fyttyngelye ;* and when the queen was orange yellow the writing was white, and when the queen was white the writing was orange yellow. The old bookshelves, with their gay untidiness of many-coloured books, were gone ; and in their place in more severe order on dark oaken bookshelves of suave design were ranked books all bound exactly alike in uniform yellow half-calf bindings. The floor was rich-stained and polished, and in the middle of it lay a rug of the yellow of saffron.

The old attic was now so rich of hue and yet so stiffly chaste that Noll almost rubbed his eyes to see if he were awake.

It was indeed a handsome room ; and yet——

Some faint whisper of the how and the why these things had chanced flashed through Noll's consciousness. Here Julia had put the savings of her hard-won earnings. A tidy mind frets at the ordered disorder of the workshop. She was of a precise habit that has a ruthless distaste for chips. She had secretly consulted the old lady, who had grimly advised her to " let the man's room be " ; but he who takes to the council of war a decided intention is irked by opposition, and smiles away the wisdom of older heads as the mere caution of senility. And indeed there was something of the poetic intention behind her gentle obstinacy, as there was behind everything she did ; for (and she knew it in her secret heart to be not wholly without a little of such jealous venom as her gentle blood could hold) she had been passionately set upon bringing into this man's life a fresh influence, a fragrance that she was sure he had not known—she was aglow with the glamour of the love-mood to be the all-in-all in the atmosphere of her lover's day. And as the rich crave ever to be more rich, so she, queening it in her little parish, was blind to the simple fact that all the subtle and gracious tenderness of her gentle womanhood had won her a larger empire over her lover than any she could hope to win by petty endeavour. The old lady, her wise old eyes seeing that the other had come to consult the oracle with the answer rather than the question, had nodded her willingness, after the first demur, to comply with the younger woman's whim. And the nod of surrender once given, she had addressed herself, during their absence on the honeymoon, to carrying out the young wife's instructions to the uttermost detail, even employing no small sum out of her own small income to the perfecting of it.

And, be it remembered, for her the doing had been no light ordering—it was a flagellation of her own nakedness with cruel whips ; for, as each change obliterated a footprint of the past, the atmosphere in which the boy and man had wrought their career swiftly vanished—the very hint of an early struggle had departed from the place.

Noll felt how the room must have struck Netherby in the face as he leaped up the stair and flung open the door to be welcomed

to its old genial comradeship after his journey and absence from his beloved things.

Noll's eyes came back from his thoughts to rest on the bent shoulders of the disconsolate man ; and Netherby realized that the other had digested the situation.

He sighed sadly, his head in his hands :

" Poor Julia !" he said—" she must never know. She has done this during our absence—as a surprise. And," he added grimly : " it was !"

Noll smiled :

" But, Netherby, my dear old boy ; you must not fret. You are famous, man——"

" Oh yes—quite. A duchess has asked me to dinner—without my wife."

Noll put out the light :

" Let us sit in the dusk for awhile, Netherby, as we have sat many a day and settled the affairs of the state. We have laughed at care here ; and kicked the world about like a football, and striven to dig up the roots of the Universe—the Why and the Wherefore and the Whence and the Whither."

Netherby sighed :

" Ah, Noll, the old room is gone. I have to begin all over again. These stiff prude seats compel me to order—tell me harshly that I must not be dreaming overmuch, nor thinking—which is next door to dreaming—but nag me to be up and doing, boiling pots or eggs or hitting something or pushing at things. I don't seem to fit in anywhere. The medieval rigours warn me to be done with visions and the reading of the visions of others ; and their hard oaken seats rise up and assault me where I would sit upon them. . . . But that is nothing. They have left me not even my books. I am bewildered—bewildered—wholly bewildered."

He sighed sadly, and went on :

" Ah, Noll, he only knows the whole delight of having possessed a child who has lost it. . . . Books are one's most intimate friends—they never change—never play us a shabby trick. How they eat into one's friendship, each dressed in his individual habit ! the very ugliness of some a reason for seeking to win their confidence ; perhaps a reason for an easy familiarity—we dog-ear them the more—mark them the more—love them the more. Put them in handsome ranks uniform, and their individuality is gone —like sisters that are primly arrayed to the same pattern to simper through a tedious garden-party. We begin to find faults where was once only affection ; and their outward seeming being now alike, like critics we seek to taste not the delights within, but carp because this has not Shakespeare's wit nor that the thunders and the music of Carlyle. These that were once our closest, most garrulous, most intimate friends have gone to join the silent ranks of library editions that no one reads. These stiff and formal backs, these ornamental edges, these dandified and dyed airs, repel me from my ancient friendships. The intimacy of years is broken—

frozen. They open no longer eagerly at the old accustomed places, stained with frequent thumbings, where my own hand cut the dear intimate leaves—they are deckle-edged and bedamned and horrible which were wont to be delightfully impertinent. I cannot find my way in the old garden that I loved—the old dog-ears are smoothed out, gone—my pencillings erased, their whisperings mute, they nudge my elbow no more. These, my one-time boon companions snub me; give me but the flabby hand-shake of necessity. They open their houses to me mincingly, and yawn affected utterance. They no longer tickle me in the ribs, touching me on the sleeve, nor beckon; they do not chuckle familiarly—nor brood with me upon the roll and march of the great significancies. Their new clothes are insistent—upon them as upon me. They smell of the oil of respectability like gagged Sunday-school children. We know each other no longer—except with formal bow and elaborate etiquette—as when a royal person enters the room of entertainment and puts good-fellowship to the rout."

He made a pause, and, passing his gaunt hand over his brow, he added sadly:

"I have come home to find myself in a strange land. . . . Shining-faced respectability has usurped my chair. . . . My kingdom has slipped from me. . . . The flowers in my garden are dead."

Noll patted him on the back:

"Tut, tut, man—you have come into a new kingdom."

He heard Julia's voice upon the stair; and he saw that the other had heard it, for he stood up and forced a smile upon his long sad face.

Noll went close to him hurriedly:

"One word, Netherby—quick, before she comes—do you know where Betty is?" he asked hoarsely.

Netherby smiled a sad smile:

"Ah, Noll, that *you* should have to ask *me* that!"

Noll passed Julia at the stair-head and left them together.

As he stepped across the hall he hesitated, turned, and went into the old lady's room. She was sitting in the window, looking out; and she turned at his footfall.

Noll bent down and kissed the old face; and he saw that the harsh light had gone out of her eyes:

"Won't you be a little lonely here to-night?" Noll asked her.

"No," she said—"she has taken seats for all three of us."

CHAPTER LXXXVIII

Wherein it is suspected that, on Occasion, the Trumpet of Fame is not Wholly Immaculate of the Hiccup

PANGBUTT'S handsome studio had been cleared for a reception ; and the deliberate old butler, throwing open the great folding-doors, walked stiffly into the room and glanced an orderly eye round the brilliantly lighted details in a last complacent survey before the near arrival of the guests.

He started at a loud peal of the door-bell, and pulled out his watch :

" I hope they are arriving early enough !" said he. " It comes of arsking these here artists to the house. . . . They're always hungry and they're always noisy, and they're always thirsty. Even if I suffered from these here afflictions I'd have the manners not to show it." He shrugged his shoulders. " I call it letting ourselves down. They don't even know how to put on their clothes like Christians."

He straddled stiffly out of the room, grumbling and mumbling.

" Leastwise not like Christians of the Established Church," he growled. . . .

He returned after awhile through the great hollow of the handsome doorway, ushering in four guests.

When they had entered, he said stiffly :

" Mr. Pangbutt, I fear, will not be down for several minutes, gentlemen ; he has only just come in to dress."

He drew out his watch from his pocket, and glanced at it aggressively.

Robbins laughed gently, and winked to the others :

" We *are* a trifle early, Dukes, I am afraid," said he, going up to the dignified old man—" but if Mr. Rippley *will* insist on sitting between the reins on the top of the hansom, the cabby drives hard to escape the inquisitive attention of the police—a body of men, Dukes, that live feverishly anxious to catch something and are bored with the greyness of the popular virtue."

He tapped the old man on the shirt-front.

The butler bowed stiffly, and withdrew.

Fluffy Reubens strode airily into the middle of the room and surveyed it :

"I say," said he—"portrait painting seems to pay, eh?"

Lovegood coughed:

"H'm—n'yes," he grunted; and added tragically: "When you can paint portraits."

"Get out!" said Fluffy, and flung himself into an easy-chair.

Rippley strolled round the room and tested the electric lights; his hands itching to be at any devilment:

"Oho!" said he—"so the curtain is to go up to-night and discover the real Anthony Bickersteth—the man of mystery—the writer of *the* book! . . . I suppose it ain't Pangbutt himself!"

Aubrey at the mantelpiece, gazing at himself in the mirror, said simply:

"Bosh!"

"Rather a dramatic situation when you come to think of it, eh?" said Fluffy Reubens, lolling his full length in the easy-chair.

Rippley, his hands in his trousers pockets, considered the situation with reflective eye fixed on the carpet:

"And a rippin' dramatic emotion, eh! To feel one's self being wrangled about from one end of the country to the other——"

Aubrey turned languidly from the mirror:

"Ah!" said he, "and then to listen to it all, robed in the delightful invisible cloak of pseudonymity!"

Rippley laughed drily:

"No, no, Aubrey, old man—that wouldn't have suited you at all. You wouldn't have lasted at it for a fortnight."

Lovegood smiled:

"We need not get into the quarrelsome stage about it yet," he said in his big deep voice: "We shall be tearing him to pieces in magazine articles to-morrow and flinging him to the dogs of the lower journalism to snarl at before the year is out. . . . The failures are always suspicious of popularity."

Aubrey turned to the mirror again, and said "Bosh!"

Fluffy Reubens winked at the others:

"I don't see that this chap Anthony Bickersteth's work is a snap better than Caroline Baddlesmere's; and he's prigged a lot of her ideas——"

Aubrey turned round to the room, took up a picturesque literary attitude, elbow on mantel, his cheek leaning on his long fingers, legs crossed, essaying to realize the portraits of the thirties, and, rousing from his adoration of himself, he said petulantly:

"My dear fluffsome Robbins, I have repeatedly told you that Caroline Baddlesmere lacks breadth of view and a man's humour—to say nothing of that certain something of subtle atmosphere that is called genius. . . . You really ought not to give me the trouble of reiterating these simple truths. . . . You compel me to feel as blatantly insistent as a bookmaker on a race-course——"

He was interrupted by the entrance of the old butler, ushering in Bartholomew Doome and Andrew Blotte—Andrew in very much crushed and wrinkled evening dress, and looking unutterably shabby, Doome well groomed.

Bartholomew Doome laughed :

" Yes," said he, " yes, yes—I heard what Aubrey was saying ; but Aubrey is a poet, not a critic."

Lovegood laughed a funny deep nasal laugh.

But Rippley had turned to the strange figure of Andrew Blotte. He smote him on the shoulder with strong genial hand :

" Cheer up, Andrew," he cried.

Blotte smiled wearily ; he roused from his brooding ; he was very pale :

" Where's the bar ?" he asked gloomily.

Rippley laughed :

" Vanity Fair has not opened her drinking-saloons yet," he said. " We're all before our welcome."

Blotte sighed, and said absently :

' I have come to tell Pangbutt I cannot sup with him to-night." He smiled a pale sad smile ; and, rousing, added moodily : " I came into my Irish estates last night—took over the keys of my castle in Spain. . . . Last night I slept under the blue quilt, and filled my belly with the north wind. And," he added hoarsely, " to-night I sup with the gods."

Rippley shook the moody man by the shoulders, and gripping them in his big kind hands, he said :

" Shut up, Blotte ; you've got to sup with *us* to-night—gods are a large order, even Aubrey is not yet translated."

Blotte roused ; laughed ; strode into the middle of the great room. He turned gloomily :

" No—I go to a mighty banquet, old friend. I go to sup with the gods to-night."

" Now, now," said Fluffy Reubens, sprawling in two chairs. " Chuck it, Blotte—you make me feel as cold as a dead undertaker. . . . Lor !" he yawned, " this is precious slow." He yawned again : " Paul Pangbutt's a confounded long time, ain't he ? Scenting his beard, I suspect !"

Andrew Blotte roused from his mood, and he began to pace up and down the room as before : " No more Italian waiters for me —with cursèd oily locks," he cried—" no more grease-spots on dingy grey table-cloths that hide their offences under smiling napkins ! . . . To-night I shall be waited upon by the gods. . . . Never again the boiled potato ; never again the homely bun, damn them ! . . . This is the night of life—a night for music and gaiety and minstrelsy. . . . Hunger shall cease, and pain——"

Rippley went up to him and took him by the shoulder, kindly :

" Stop it, Blotte. Aren't you well, old man ?"

Blotte laughed :

" Well ? . . . Psha ! I am like a boy. The new genius arrives to-night. And I go off—to sup with the gods. . . . The world has forgotten Andrew Blotte."

Rippley turned, a twinkle in his eye, to the others :

" I say, boys," said he—" as it's to be a unique night, and Blotte about to be translated, and may be in the papers in the morning——"

Blotte laughed grimly, where he paced :

" Oh, yes," he growled—" I shall be in the papers to-morrow. Have no fear of it."

Rippley slapped him on the shoulder :

" Then," said he, " we ought to give Pangbutt's house an air. There is a lack of the grand manner here. One man-servant is ridiculously inadequate. At least three of us ought to assist to wait on the guests. Doome and Fluffy and I and—and you, Blotte—would make a ripping lot of waiters, and it wouldn't be half so slow as talking art and rot to people who don't know. . . . Genius shall serve the mob. This night must never be forgotten. By Macready, yes—Pangbutt used to play at play-acting ! But where are his properties ?"

Blotte was striding the room ; he laughed :

" Ay, ay—the gala-night of life should be gay and joyous," cried he—" all the candles lit, as for a bridal." He came to a halt, scowled at the dark hollow of the great doorway, and strode thither.

The old butler was lurking suspiciously outside.

Blotte grabbed him by his coat lapel, and drew him into the light :

" Hireling fellow," said he, " bring more lights. This place is like a damned omnibus."

The old butler held out an expostulant palm in dignified remonstrance :

" Gentlemen, gentlemen—the guests will be arriving in a few minutes——"

Rippley went up to him, and gripping his fingers in the old servant's waistcoat, pulled him into the room.

" Don't talk like an unfrocked bishop, Dukes—it's most irreligious," said he. " Look here "—he slapped the old man's chest jocosely—" your master and the amateur aristocracy used to have private theatricals here. Where are his wigs and make-up things ? Where does he keep them ? Quick !"

The old butler promptly began to retire backwards upon a handsome cabinet :

" Gentlemen, gentlemen ; surely I have no need to remind you that Mr. Pangbutt's wigs are his private property " said the shocked, anxious old man. " I haven't Mr. Pangbutt's permission——"

Rippley followed him up, grimly smiling :

" Get out, you old panjandrum !" said he. " You've shown the hiding-place, you naughty old deceiver. Go away !"

He pushed the expostulating old man from the cabinet, and, throwing open the drawers, proceeded to ransack them."

" Hullo !" he cried—" splendid !"

He struck a match :

" Spirit lamp—everything. Ginger ! Here's a glorious short beard affair that goes down the middle of the chin and all along the throat."

He put it on.

"By Clarkson, makes me look like a ducal butler—I'll be butler."

He flung off his coat, and his deft fingers began to fix the disguise on his chin.

The butler touched him upon his shirt-sleeve in dignified despair:

"Gentlemen," said he—"this is not decent. I repeat—it is not honest."

"Go hon!" said Rippley, punching the old man in the ribs with his elbow, and working away at the fixing of his throat-beard. "Look here, Fluffy," he called hurriedly—"you and Doome *must* run this pompous old dolt downstairs and shoot him into the cellar—and lock him in. Quick! or the people will be arriving. . . . I hear carriage-wheels."

Robbins and Doome seized the shocked old man and hurried his protesting stiff being out of the room and down the stairs.

Rippley followed them to the top of the stairs, making up his disguise as he went:

"Look here, boys," he called down in a hoarse whisper—"if the old fool will swear not to move away from the hall door until we release him you needn't put him in the cellar. . . . What? . . . Eh? . . . He says he surrenders? That's all right then. Now back with you—quick! or the guests will be here—or Pang-butt himself."

There was a loud ring at the door-bell.

Rippley skipped back to the cabinet: and from the cabinet he ran to Andrew Blotte:

"Blotte, old boy," said he, pulling a red wig over the gloomy man's head and combing the lank red hair down the sides of his pale face—"you must look after the cloak-room and change the tickets and mix the hats. . . . Ha-ha!" He laughed mock-tragically. "This night must never be forgotten!"

"It never will," said Blotte; and laughing grimly he got striding again in the red wig, as Fluffy Reubens and Doome burst into the room.

"Here, Fluffy," said Rippley, "quick, man! put on this yellow wig, and comb it well over your eyes. There isn't a moment to be lost; Doome, here's a black moustache and a greyish wig—this is the way to stick it on—see? Splendid! Makes you look like a broken-down Italian tenor.

He searched about in the cabinet and found a stubbly black wig which he pulled over his own hair, and was at once a son of France:

"Look here, boys, I'm head-waiter, see! And when I bow, you bow: and when I rub my hands, you rub your hands; and don't forget the foreign accent—try to talk English as you used to talk French. . . . Doome, you stand at the landing below, and see that old Dukes don't stir a step from the door—and bawl up the names from him. And you, Fluffy, play the general ass. I'll stick to the door here. . . . Are we all right now? . . . No, Blotte's not enough disguised. Here, Doome, fasten this fierce

moustache on his lip, whilst I shut up. . . . O lor ! here they come !"

Rippley had scarcely hurried into his coat when there entered and halted in the great doorway a hesitating figure in the white satin dress of a courtier of Charles the First, lace frills at his weak knees, white stockings, white shoes, and holding a plumed hat in his hand.

His eyeglass dropped out of his eye, and he stood there stuttering and aghast.

There was a titter.

" Sharles ze Foorst—risen from ze dead !" announced Rippley.

" I say "—the affected drawl discovered Ffolliott. " Rippley told me it was a—fancy-dress—affair," he said plaintively. " And to come early."

There was a wild shout of laughter.

Ffolliott looked round nervously at the strange faces, and recognising Aubrey at last, by the mirror, he said peevishly :

" I am exceedingly displeased with Rippley—he—he chose my dress."

Rippley wiped the tears from his eyes :

" Well—don't you see we are nearly all in disguise ? . . . except Aubrey, who thinks that because he looks like an ass no one will know him." He turned to the others : " I say, boys," he added, chuckling, " things are beginning to move at last. This *is* going to be a unique night."

" Hush !"

They had all turned to Blotte, and a strange silence fell upon the room.

Andrew Blotte stood listening, as to some strange sounds. He roused :

" Ay, I sup with the gods to-night. . . . And I can hear the guests arriving—all the clever fellows that have made the world a delight—and with them come the dear dead companions that worked with us, and sang with us, and drank with us—in Paris. . . . I know them—they talk such damned bad French."

Rippley went and touched him on the shoulder :

" Blotte, old boy ; you're very queer to-night," he said. " You make me feel as blue as a newly-clipped hearse-horse."

Blotte roused, and moved towards the door ; halted ; turned to them all :

" I say I sup with the gods to-night—and mix the hats—and set the table in a roar. . . . I must hasten away. . . . I hear them call. . . . God bless you, dear boys ! we shall meet in sunshine——"

Rippley stepped to the door :

" Quick !" said he in a hushed whisper, " make a line, quick there, you Fluffy, Doome, Blotte, to my left here at the door. Here comes Pangbutt. . . . He blows his nose like the old nobility. . . . Come along, Blotte—don't look like a broken-down anarchist in an advanced stage of pip You must affect the smiling, friendly, neapolitan manner, expectant of a fee."

As Blotte's pale face took on a deathly smile, Rippley bowed, and there stepped into the open doorway the well-groomed figure of their host.

Pangbutt halted, perplexed.

He gazed in vague consternation at the Vandyke travesty in white silks before him—turned to the solemn countenances of the four waiters :

'May I ask what, in the name of Beelzebub, is happening in this house ?" he asked.

Rippley clasped his hands together unctuously, bowed, smiled a large Italian smile. He advanced a step, and said with a strong foreign accent, picking his words with slow deliberation :

" Sir Pangboot—it has arrive to ze domestic bootler that he is indispose sudden-ment. I am he's friend that he have ask to take he's place, vis my assecstants. . . . Your house shall have ze much honour in my hands—we have the habit to attend ze best families——"

There was a loud ringing of the door-bell.

Pangbutt put his hand over his eyes :

" I must be going mad," he said.

Rippley bowed :

" Sir Pangboot—me and me friends, we speak not very well ze Engleesh—but we much understand it well—and——"

" Yes, yes." Pangbutt dismissed them impatiently. " Get to your business. . . . Curse it ! I wonder what on earth ails Dukes."

As the four comic-looking foreign waiters left the room, he hesitated, bewildered. And Rippley, as they passed out, nearly burst a bloodvessel as the tragic Blotte's moustache fell off. But Pangbutt had suddenly remembered that he was host ; and advancing into the room he turned to the others :

" I beg your pardon, I am late I fear."

He shook hands with Lovegood and Aubrey ; and, turning to Ffolliott, a faint smile flickered over his worried face :

" Ffolliott ! . . . Sorry to be late, but there have been domestic difficulties—my butler has gone sick."

The guests were arriving fast.

" Mistair Maupassant Fosse !" bawled Rippley at the door.

The little man glared at the servant, fussed into the room, and tripped across to his host.

" A nickname they have for me," he said—" a nickname. . . ."

Rippley watched Blotte solemnly tramp down the stairs, his wig on one side ; heard him announce to a lady, just arrived, that he was going to sup with the gods ; and he was gone.

Groups of guests came swarming up the stairs and passed into the studio.

Rippley, glancing into the studio, saw the white satin dress of Ffolliott move uneasily amongst the arriving guests ; and he heard his thin, affected drawl as he explained to his host :

" D'you know—I feel such an ass——"

Pangbutt patted him upon the shoulder :

"Never mind," said he absently—"it can't be helped. Make the best of it."

"Oh, but I assure you—they told me it was to be a fancy-dress affair."

Ripley bawled at the door:

"Sir Gilders Cinnamon!"

Sir Gilders Persimmon shuffled into the room; and Pangbutt went to meet the old baronet.

"Lady Persimmon coming to-night, Sir Gilders?" he shouted into his ear; the old man shook his head.

"Sorry," bawled Pangbutt into his ear; "Sir Gilders, allow me to introduce Mr. Fosse, who, I need not tell you, is the well-known critic. He has written a eulogy of Anthony Bickersteth that is to appear in a few days—you must win his favour to your poems."

The old baronet cackled with senile laughter.

Fosse threw up his head. He glowed. He felt that all eyes were upon him.

"Yes," he said—"my eulogy appears to-morrow." He forgot to bawl.

Sir Gilders put his hand to his ear: the entrance and stir of the arriving guests and their announcement and greetings perplexed his weak hearing:

"Eh?" said he—"borrow? Why borrow?"

"No, Sir Gilders," cried Fosse, getting very hot—"I did not say borrow—I said my eulogy appears to-morrow."

"Why?" asked the old man.

There was a titter. . . .

Ffolliott, thinking he saw someone he knew, went up to Lovegood and slapped the big man on the back:

"Hullo, old chap!" cried he.

Blank consternation came upon him as Lovegood slowly turned and solemnly faced him. The weak-knee'd, foolish Ffolliott faltered nervously:

"Oh, er—er—I thought you were someone else," he drawled.

Lovegood nodded gloomily.

"I am," he said sepulchrally.

Ffolliott tittered confusedly:

"Ye-yes—indeed," he said, twisting his fingers and fidgeting. "D'you know, I feel such an awful ass——"

Lovegood coughed:

"But that is no excuse for your being in the other ass's skin!" he growled.

"Oh, but don't you see—that's just it! They told me it was a fancy-dress affair. . . ."

"Eh?" bawled Sir Gilders Persimmon.

All eyes turned from Ffolliott to the perspiring Fosse. The little man shifted uneasily under the fire of many amused critical eyes.

"I was saying," shrilled the minor critic in his thin jerky voice, "that the man who does not play whist is laying up a sad old age for himself."

The old baronet shook his head:

"The man who what ?"

Fosse licked his lips sullenly :

"The man who doesn't play whist," shrieked Fosse, reddening miserably.

"What about him ?" asked Sir Gilders peremptorily.

"Lays up a sad old age for himself," screamed the miserable little man.

The old gentleman knit his brows :

"A reformed rake ?" he asked testily. . . .

But attention was diverted from the fussy little minor critic's despair by the murmur of admiration which greeted the entrance into the room of a beautiful woman to whom Quogge Myre was paying aggressively marked court as the announcement of her name called the regard of the assembled guests to her arrival. Myre was ever for stealing the lime-light. He was a born filcher of honour. But the beauty's calm dismissal of him, as she swept towards her host, gave Myre a sudden hysteric desire to talk loudly and hide his chagrin ; and he turned at the sound of Fosse's voice, raised in argument, as hyena goes to offal. Fosse in his despair had turned from Sir Gilders, and launched into the discussion round about him :

"In the arts," he was saying, "woman does not, cannot, shine. She only exists—on sufferance. A woman's province——"

Myre had strolled towards the voice :

"I am flattered to find," said he, "that Mr. Fosse has been reading me. He is right. A woman's province is to be beautiful ; and if she write at all she may write of the nursery—of the domesticities. A woman has not the experiences of life—she writes only from intuition. She cannot experience the emotions of a man—cannot describe all shades of life—is too careful of her skirts to have been on the heights and in the gutters——"

Lovegood coughed :

"Never," said he, with big deliberate voice—"never shall I again approach a municipal sewer without an ecstatic thrill."

Quogge Myre took no notice of the shaft :

"A woman," said he, "cannot be in the thrash and fume of life. She only peeps out fearfully over the window-blind at the doings of the world. She has not physical strength——"

Somebody coughed :

"Tra-la-lee !" said he—"opera—bouffe—bouffe—bouffe."

Myre went suddenly dumb. . . .

Sir Gilders Persimmon had shuffled over to Fosse, who was wetting his lips, eager to leap into the debate, when Myre's yawing should give opportunity, and, button-holing the fussy little man, the deaf old gentleman asked him :

"You said, sir, that the reformed rake did what ?"

"No, Sir Gilders—I said that the man who does not play whist is laying up a sad old age——"

The old gentleman poked him slyly in the lean ribs :

"Makes the best husband, eh ! Indeed, yes—very likely—very likely. But it's dangerous doctrine—it's——"

"No, Sir Gilders," shrieked the perspiring little man—"I say the man who does not play *whist*." He coughed—his voice breaking. "Oh, damn this old gentleman!" he added, moving irritably away from him. . . .

Quogge Myre turned to Pangbutt:

"Now, Pangbutt, mind you, I don't say that this Anthony Bickersteth is a Balzac; but he has the true genius for literature. How can you define these things? It is there, or it is not there!"

Fosse skipped up to the group:

"What *I* say—what *I* say——"

Quogge Myre stared at his little disciple with contempt; a sneer played about his puffy lip—became too tense for silence:

"This man repeats what I say—what I *used* to say—like flattery," he said.

Lovegood smiled grimly:

"Oh," said he—"*he* stays in Paris sometimes now. And there are the French newspapers."

Myre shrugged his shoulders:

"I have changed all my ideas on these subjects——"

But the ridiculous figure of Ffolliott strolled nervously up to the group, and interrupting the critical vapourings of Quogge Myre, he said with affected drawl:

"D'you know, I feel such an awful ass—and I don't get used to it."

Lovegood gazed at him solemnly:

"Young fellow," said he—"you must not be egotistical—it's bad for the morals. Try and forget yourself in that disguise."

"I can't," drawled Ffolliott miserably—"I am quite angry with Rippley—he told me it was a fancy-dress affair—and——"

Fosse turned his back upon him impatiently:

"I repeat," said he—"and I have a signed article in *The Discriminator* to prove it—a genius has arrived."

"By Pegasus?" sneered Aubrey, raising ironic eyebrows.

Lovegood laughed:

"No—by omnibus," said he. "Let us all be winged asses to-night. Fosse has not secured a government monopoly." . . .

From the great doorway:

"Mistair and Mrs. Nezzerbie Gomme!" announced Rippley; and as the pair were greeted by all near them, Rippley stepped to the head of the great stairs, and going up to a pompous man as that worthy set foot on the topmost step, he said to him confidentially:

"I say, mister, would you mind running down the stairs and telling the fellar with the red hair that I want him?"

Sir Tankerton Wollup swelled slowly:

"Pooh—pooh!" said he, drawing himself up; and he strutted to the door.

"Poof—poof!" said Rippley. "Giddy old thing!"

He glanced over the balustrade down to the next landing, and caught Doome's eye:

"Be-elzebub!" he growled—"the whole town's coming to this

silly theatrical affair. . . . I say, we ought to go and see that Andrew Blotte's mixing the hats thoroughly. Hullo ! There's Anthony Baddlesmere just arrived. Wait, I'll come down. I want to see him."

He made his way down through an ascending stream of newly-arrived guests, with some difficulty, just as Ffolliott, seeing Sir Tankerton Wollup hesitate at the door, went up to the great man mincingly, and said affectedly :

" Oh, I say, Sir Tankerton—d'you know, I feel such an awful ass—but they told me it was a fancy-dress affair."

Sir Tankerton, staring with bloodshot eyes of ruffled dignity at the thing before him, sniffed.

" Go away !" he said testily.

Ffolliott went away.

As the pompous millionaire stood irresolute at the doorway, an absent-minded snuffy little old gentleman shuffled up to his elbow, followed at a couple of paces by a little faded old lady of withered prehistoric design, and, touching him on the sleeve inquiringly, said :

" My good man—before you announce our names, will you tell me which is the host ? I have never seen my host before—in fact——"

" Poof—poof !" squealed Sir Tankerton Wollup, and strutted into the room.

" Dear me !" The little old gentleman turned to his little old lady ; and added in a confidential undertone :

" A most extraordinary person—a most extraordinary *house !* . . . But I have always heard, my dear, that Bohemia was a strange country. . . . In fact, Charlotte, it's *rather* thrilling, is it not ?"

The little withered lady, all pleased excitement, said : " *Quite* thrilling, James !"

Pangbutt seeing awkwardness at the door, and missing the loud announcement of names, went a few paces closer to it to meet his newly-arrived guests.

The little old gentleman entered the room vaguely, the dandruff of the philosophic habit upon his coat-collar, and his wig full of reasons—very markedly a professor. He had the air of cataloguing ideas. The little old lady, a couple of paces behind him, followed him.

Pangbutt exchanged greetings with him.

Said the professor :

" Good-evening, sir ; my sister's husband's brother-in-law, Sir Gilders Persimmon, was good enough to say that you would allow me to meet Mr. Anthony Bickersteth here. . . . I am writing a work to disprove the insanity of genius. . . . It is a part of my theory that the human personality cannot be hidden by artifice—that the strong temperament shows itself in the vigorous growth of the hair—and so on. . . . I am, sir, I may have forgotten to say, Professor Curtis. . . . I am an inveterate novel-reader. . . . My wife keeps a diary. . . . Where are you, Charlotte ?

Ah, yes. But, fervently as I admire Mr. Bickersteth's prose, I should like to suggest to him that in his next work he might make more of that unworked mine, the folk-lore of the London coster—or greengrocer. . . . I am most anxious that Mr. Bickersteth should be a virile person whose moustache springs out strongly from under the nostrils, with a tendency towards ruddiness in the colouring. . . . But I fear that on this—what I may call his—er," he tittered—" his unveiling, I am too thrilled."

He kept button-holing Pangbutt :

" Too thrilled to—er—I am thrilled, sir, thrilled, as indeed is Charlotte—oh, ah, yes—Charlotte !" He searched about behind him for the little old lady, who moved up to his side. " Oh, ah, yes—there you are, Charlotte ! Allow me to introduce Mr. Pangbutt, our host. May I ask, sir, if Mr. Anthony Bickersteth has yet arrived ? No ? . . . How fortunate ! How very fortunate ! . . . Charlotte, I am becoming quite excited."

Pangbutt led them to chairs.

Two richly-dressed ladies of an age that discovers as much as is concealed by considerable dressing, hesitated at the door ; and one, taking a last amused glance over her shoulder at some incident that passed upon the stairs below, tittered, and, turning, swept the room with keen regard through her raised lorgnettes.

" How amusin' ! how absolutely amusin' !" she crooned. " I like literary and artistic people *so* much."

" Yes," said the other, " they are *so* different to one's own class. . . . And actresses *dress* so well !"

She flung back an elaborate head of jewels, and whispered something to the lady of the lorgnettes.

The lady of the lorgnettes laughed :

" Really ?" said she

" H'm, h'm !—yes. Pills."

" Mr. Pangbutt's father ?"

" H'm, h'm ! Yes. I assure you."

" Dear me ! And he has such a very distinguished manner !"

" And—d'you know ?"

She whispered.

" Lady Persimmon ? Indeed ?"

The lady of the lorgnettes nodded mysteriously. The withered eyes expressed shocked surprise. She gave a funny little laugh. The lorgnettes were raised again, and she said, surveying the assembled guests critically through the glasses :

" I absolutely *adore* literary people—and artists—and actors—and those sort of persons. It is so strange to think they have all slept in attics. And really, it's quite the *fashion* to go on the stage now. . . . Who's the fright in the post-office red ? . . . Oh ! is it ? . . . Lady Margaret's son has gone on the stage. . . . Gerty, do you know who that dark creature is? with the Italian-looking person. . . . Oh, yes ; and the young fellow is getting on wonderfully. You see, they like to have a gentleman on the stage—besides, he acts in the most gentlemanly manner—quite unlike a professional actor. And then, of course, his

manager is rather exclusive—he called the company together the other day, and told them that he did not expect them to recognise him in the street. It's so nice for the young fellow to be with such a *gentleman.*"

"Yes. Our gardener's son has joined a circus too. Such an amusin' boy, he was."

"It brings it all so home to one, doesn't it!"

"Doesn't it, indeed! But I confess I have always been fascinated by the stage. There's somethin' so very romantic about livin' in green-rooms and paintin' your face, and—pretendin' to be someone else."

The other whispered in her ear.

The lorgnettes were flicked open again, and glittered upon Sir Gilders Persimmon.

"Indeed! But he is so very old—and she—but there is such a difference of social rank between a baronet's wife and a mere painter—surely! Still, he *is* very old. Almost permissible sin, Gerty."

They both tittered.

"My dear," said the other, "you are really quite naughty."

Sir Gilders pounced upon Fosse, whom he had followed round the room, put up a hand to aid his dull hearing, and said:

"You were speaking of dotage——"

Fosse winced uneasily:

"No, sir," he shrieked—"I was *not* talking of dotage. I say that the man who does not play whist lays up a sad old age for himself." And, turning on his heel impatiently, "The devil take the man!" said he, and walked away.

Ffolliott espying the two newly-arrived ladies across the room, made his way to them:

"Do you know, Miss Foljambe Pfinch," he said—"I feel such an ass; they told me it was a—fancy—dress—affair."

The lorgnettes were turned upon him:

"It's that ridiculous Mr. Ffolliott," said she; and laughed immoderately.

Ffolliott sighed, and turned away:

"Everybody seems to think I am an ass to-night," he said wearily. "Oh, there's Fosse. I don't like Fosse—but I'll talk to *him.* No—he's talking to another man. I think I'll go home. No, I won't, I'll sit down."

He sat down.

"Every fellow does something idiotic in his life," he said.

He watched Fosse button-hole Gomme; and he saw Gomme's lips smile amusedly as he gazed at the floor, listening to him.

He bent all his attention to hear what passed between the two.

"Now, you know, Mr. Gomme," said the fussy little man—"in confidence, all these fellows take themselves too seriously to-day. Look at Rippley! he's utterly uncultured—he hasn't an aitch in his composition."

Gomme nodded:

"But there isn't an aitch in composition," he said demurely.

"N-no." Fosse stammered, becoming nervous. "But he can't even pronounce the names of the ancients whose gods he models!"

Gomme smiled:

"No—but he can model 'em."

Fosse was puzzled for an answer:

"N'yes, that's true perhaps. But there's Aubrey—look at his legs, his knees, his hair, his airs, his ties! He is for ever publishing volumes of poems which no one reads."

"Yes," said Gomme. "But the publishers must have their luxuries."

"Then there is Blotte. You know he has never produced a complete work yet."

"Maybe. But supposing one day he writes lines that, like some of his handsome acts, shall never fade!"

"Oh, you think that!" said Fosse, licking his lips. "Well now, there's Lovegood. You know, he never says a really exquisite thing—he is always ponderous—and rather obvious. He has not made his mark."

Gomme sighed:

"Supposing he has done acts that will live in the memory of his friends, Mr. Fosse! And—perhaps—when he has been dead a hundred years——" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh—er—you really think so." The foxy little eyes of Mr. Fosse were searching the humorist's features keenly.

Netherby Gomme took Fosse's arm:

"And, Mr. Fosse, there's this Netherby Gomme, the overrated rogue," said he, with a whimsical twinkle in the eyes; "you know, he never really says a humorous thing."

Fosse sighed:

"But he can write them," he said.

Gomme laughed, and gripping the little man's thin shoulder, said he:

"Fosse, you are sometimes inspired. . . . You are inspired to-night. . . . I have never known you so inspired."

Fosse smirked:

"Well, anyway," he said—and he grew taller as he said it—"I think that to-morrow I shall have convinced many that, to create a masterpiece, requires a man's powers and a man's wit and——"

"Mr. Anthony Bickersteth!"

The old butler stood at the door and sang out the name, making the announcement in a loud clear voice.

A sudden hush fell upon the assembled guests. There was a craning towards the great open doors.

A rustle of silk, and Caroline Baddlesmere stepped into their sight.

The silence was broken by a hoarse utterance from Fosse:

"My God!" said he; and was dumb.

There was a loud shout from the bohemians, who rushed to

greet Caroline ; but the smile that had flickered about her lips went out.

Anthony Baddlesmere had entered the room.

" Caroline," said he—" quick, for God's sake, where is Paul ?"

She signed towards him where he stood near at hand by the door.

" Why ?" she asked.

" Kate Ormsby has been found—it's too horrible," he said.

He glanced round the room, and hurriedly made for his host :

" Paul," he said hoarsely—" get rid of these people."

Pangbutt raised surprised eyes :

" Get rid ?" he stammered. " Why ?"

Anthony Baddlesmere made an impatient gesture :

" Tell them they must go. Send them down to supper—no he's lying on the supper table. Let the butler tell them there's death in the house——"

" Death ?"

" Anything, Paul—get rid of them."

Pangbutt's eyes were a blank bewildered surprise :

" But—but——"

Anthony touched his arm :

" For God's sake, Paul—give the order."

" But why ?"

Pangbutt wet his dogged lips sullenly.

Anthony took hold of his shoulder :

" Andrew Blotte has hanged himself in your cellars. I was just too late."

" My God !"

Pangbutt's voice was a shadow of a whisper. The floor swung up to strike him—swung away from his feet so that he nearly fell. He reeled a step, and sank into the gilt armchair that was the splendid seat for his painting-throne.

The whisper spread ; and the guests stole quietly from the place.

CHAPTER LXXXIX

Wherein Andrew Blotte draws aside the Arras that hangs Across the Unknown and joins the Company at a Larger Banquet

They left their host alone with Anthony Baddlesmere.

The wretched man, sunk in a dazed huddle in the midst of his splendid home, sat crouched in the gilt chair, bewildered, as one struck down by a sudden blow. Slowly his wits came back and traced a miserable picture of bygone fatuities and a black knavery into the elaborate design of the rich carpet at his feet.

His lips moved with guttural complaint :

" God ! what an awakening ! what an awakening ! . . . What strange destiny arranges it all ? . . . The coming of this thing has haunted me for nights. . . . There seems to come into our lives a day when we awake of a sudden from the aimless inconsequences of years—to the aimlessness. But—God ! what an awakening !"

Anthony Baddlesmere went to him and laid a gentle hand on his shoulder :

" It is something to have awakened, Paul."

There was a long silence. The miserable man, his face between his hands, thus crouching there, elbows on knees, gazed at the strange things that wove themselves into the pattern at his feet.

He roused again :

" There will always be this dead man in my house," he said hoarsely.

Baddlesmere sighed sadly :

" I fear it," said he.

Paul Pangbutt was silent for awhile.

" Anthony," he said at last—" why did the man do this thing ?"

" He put his bed in pawn three days ago—for the little singing woman—Kate Ormsby. But she has utterly gone under—since—Paris." He hesitated. . . . " I found her this morning. . . . He was with her. . . . She had taken her life with her own hand, at daybreak. You remember how she used to air her pathetic little ambitions about Fame and Name ! Well, Death has fanned up her little flame of Notoriety for nine days at last. Her name will be in large letters on all the newspaper bills to-night. And "—he smiled sadly—" she will not see it !"

"But why did he do this thing, man?" The miserable voice was a dry-throated whisper. "Why did he do—this—awful—thing?"

"He must have been starving—starving—for days. He had promised to come to me if he needed help. . . . His pockets were empty—except for pawnbrokers' tickets—he had even hired his clothes for to-night. I came away as—they—were—searching him—downstairs—on the supper-table."

The other sat brooding for awhile:

"I might have helped—I did not know."

"Ah, Paul—we *could* have helped—we *ought* to have known."

Pangbutt buried his face in his hands:

"This is horrible," he said.

"Paul," said Baddlesmere—"I had better go and see what is being done."

The other nodded.

The old butler hobbled into the room, as Baddlesmere went out. He carried a letter on a silver salver:

"This letter, sir, was found in Mr. Blotte's breast-pocket," he said, standing beside the crouching figure of his master.

He coughed.

"It is addressed to you, sir," he said.

Pangbutt did not move.

The old servant coughed again:

"And, beg pardon, sir——"

Pangbutt made a gesture of impatience:

"Yes, yes, Dukes," he said wearily, "give me the letter."

He put out his hand and took it from the salver, dazedly. He tore open the cover, listlessly. As he unfolded the sheet of paper, a bundle of dingy pawnbrokers' tickets fell out of a piece of paper that fluttered to the floor. The old butler stooped stiffly, and handed them to him.

Pangbutt read:

"Paul Pangbutt,

I am claiming your hospitality to-night—indeed, I have nowhere else to go. It is the last night of my winter—the last hour of my insignificance. To-morrow I shall have drifted into fame on the tide of a passing scandal. My last poem will have a fictitious money-value out of all proportion to its intrinsic literary merits. Here you have it—my trust to you.

It is a crude rattle-pot affair enough, but the ink is near done; the rhymes jostle each other, for my last candle is burnt low; and, like school-girls and professors of letters, your editor has the delusion, like them that make laws for our art and decide as to our magnificence, that rhymes are the essentials of the poetic. Therefore, so that it may pass for poetry, I have flung you a rhyme or so—literature to come to birth in these days must satisfy the newspaper offices.

Take this, then, to one of these procurers of letters, and offer it for sale. Let him bid high, remembering the value of

the scandal; and, with the monies, I charge you redeem my pledges and distribute my few personal knick-knacks where they shall cease to be scored with the scratchings of pawnbrokers, amongst my dear old friends—for, God granted me that splendid largess, spite of all my sins.

There will fall a tear for Andrew Blotte; but there will be more of shrugging of respectable shoulders.

To-morrow will whisper that I was mad.

Tush! what is madness? To half the world, madness is but the rejection of the commonplace. The sanest sit in the centre of the whirligig of life, self-satisfied with their sanity and hugging it, but if they wait long enough, even to them old age will bring prattling wits, and the giggle of foolishness. The bee in the bonnet is an affair of a few years. Who shall escape the passing delirium, wrap he his grey habit about him ever so closely and sit he ever so still for fear of coming to light-headedness by walking amongst the heights and taking the risks of great adventure? We must needs wear the straws in our hair, even though it be in some corner, furtively, hoping others think us wise—if we but wait long enough. I'm for your summer madness—and to-night I go to make revel with the gods.

What more mad than to live alone! how worse than mad to have wrought loneliness to others! What more cracked-brained dolt than he who grinds to dust his grubbing years, thinking to find happiness in large figures of gold when his hair is grown grey within the four walls of a counting-house—whilst slip past him, unknown, unfelt, with the clock's every tick, the little joys that build a splendid experience. They that grub for wealth as an end are like mad hogs that bury their eyes in noisome swill, unsuspecting that life is a glorious pageant, and goes by.

Mad? Who so mad as they who rush through their years to vague ends and sordid aims? These flip through the pages of the book of life, missing the sweetness of its wide romance, that they may but know the end of the tale. And whither leads this frantic skipping? To old age, and withering, and decay, and the grave.

Tush! Life's a Jest. Even Unconscious Humour grinds the Unconscious Joke. We make a fuss of all we do, though it end in Smoke. . . . A little skip upon this little earth, maybe in tinsel of the Great—the years skip also, and we find ourselves without Heaven's Gate, naked of all we had, save the Habit of Kind Things we did and Spoke.

Philosophy, with critic eyes, examines our Emotions; his sight grows dim, his heart runs dry, in analyzing Notions; his brains are sear with brow-knit peer at Things that Do Not Matter —of a sudden he learns that Acts are Life, Theories but Ink or Chatter; he awakes to find Life is left behind, his eyes Lone Age in the Mirror meet—the Old Man with the Scythe goes by and sweeps him from his feet.

Why burn the Fire of life to questionable Idols? or seek

the useless things we may not know ? Religion is not in our solemn Goings to Church, but in the sweet things that we do between, in these our little wanderings to and fro—the giving of a part of our success, a tithe or so, to help our fellows with a hand unseen. Therefore, so let us live that whilst we live we each the other profit, and walk our little moment in nice ways, and talk not of it.

How pompous are we in the contemplation of our little selves ! The narrow vision of each one of us sees in the broad fertile world but the carpet for our individual feet. But, hist ! in the middle of our strut a something snaps—we pass, with scarce a sigh, into an eternal mystery. . . . So it comes that a still white figure lies a-bed, for once in some becoming stiffness of the thing called dignity—and in the room and all about, they that walk, walk hushedly, sobbing that one is dead. And for a night they weep. But at the daybreak of the morrow the mourners, wearied with weeping, raise half-forgetting eyes window-wards, and peep out through the streak of daylight by the blind, where poised in swinging skies the exultant lark hails the gladdening sun that comes on swift obliterating feet to paint with gaudy colours a new world. So they that weep arise, and sigh, and dry their eyes, and bury their dead ; and, the dear dead departed, draw their blinds—and lo ! in the garden where we laughed in pleasant toil, another digs and delves.

So falls God's blot on

ANDREW BLOTTE."

The paper fluttered and fell from Pangbutt's fingers.

The old man-servant coughed :

" I 'ope, sir, that I did right ; but I gave the two models, that got here first with the good news, a sovereign apiece. Mr. Rippley he said it was a dead-heat between them——"

" Sovereigns ? models ?"

Pangbutt's brows contracted painfully :

The old man servant started at the hoarse whisper :

" Yes, sir—it's election night, sir—at the Royal Academy, sir. And Mr. Rippley has been elected for sculpture, and yourself for painting."

Pangbutt burst into a horrible fit of loud laughter, and shook his head, and laughed and laughed again.

He stopped and looked at the old servant ; and again he burst into his horrible laugh.

" Gord !" said the old butler.

The old man, looking down upon the huddled figure that laughed, saw that his wits had snapped.

CHAPTER XC

Wherein Hereditary Greatness fails to Glitter Hidalgic

In Mr. Sim Crittenden, the music-hall star, the adored comedian of London's masses, what remained of the old prize-fighting ostler of Burford was severely disguised under the pose of the baritone god—the maker of the horse-laugh of the multitude. But to the credit of the tailor, be it said, it was impossible to cover all sign of the huge shoulders, the great chest; and the gloves he wore only exaggerated the weight of the hard-hitting hands.

Mr. Sim Crittenden, arrayed in an elaborately loud attempt to be strikingly quiet in hue, and aspiring to the latest severity of mode, to catch as it were the careful carelessness of the young blood at the seaside, sat on a bench on Hampstead Heath beside the light and befrilled figure of Miss Polly Whiffles, temporarily Ffolliott; she drew patterns of embarrassment in the gravel whilst he held her in earnest conversation.

"Now, look here, Polly," said Sim Crittenden—"I'm a rough man. . . . I know you are a lady and ought to marry a curate, and I'm no account, and all that. But I think I can get it to you if you'll be patient. . . . I'm on the music-halls, I'm makin' eighty gold pieces every week. It's no good being modest about it, and I'm not—that's God's truth put into the naked vernacular. It may sound vulgar, but it's so. . . . Now, ye know, I don't know what to do with it—that's the fact. I could buy fancy rabbits or a talkin' canary and all that—or I could chuck it about on the turf at race-meetin's—but unfortunately God did not make me in the image of a jackass, and I'm not going against the works of God. I'm modest. . . . I could start a girl and a brougham, but I'm tired of prize-fighting. . . . Now, what I say is this: if I had your dainty little person a-sittin' at the end of my table every day, it might make me look less of a blamey athlete and more of a man of fashion, see! Eh?"

The girl hesitated.

Mr. Sim Crittenden touched her arm anxiously:

"Besides, Whiffles isn't much of a name; no woman could be called Whiffles and remain virtuous."

The girl smiled sadly:

"No, Sim—you don't understand. I've sat as a model."

"I'm not to be blamed for falling in love with a good figure, am I ?" said Mr. Sim Crittenden laconically.

She smiled away a tear :

"There's the boy," she said—"my Ponsonby has no father."

Mr. Sim Crittenden pushed his hat back on his head :

"That's all tommy nonsense," said he. "If I ain't strong enough to be his father, good God, what's the use of giving me eighty pounds a week, eh ? . . . What ? . . . Born out o' wedlock ? Blame me, so was I. . . . Now, come—drop this nonsense ; let me hug you well—though it is a blamed nervous job with me always—you're as delicate as a confounded caramel —though I must say I like it when I get there—and——"

Now it so chanced that as the Honourable Rupert Greppel, strolling hidalgic beside his nervous little aristocratic friend, Lord Monty Askew, took a short cut down a dirty side-alley off Booksellers' Row—Monty complaining the while that they should have allowed the smells of so unusual a proceeding to come between them and their nobility—Mr. Sim Crittenden came down the other end of the same high-smelling byway, his pretty Polly at his side, with intent to get her some dinner at a restaurant he knew of, before the dusk grew to darkness and he had to answer his call "to play the giddy goat for a consideration" at one of those places called music-halls.

There were but few of its dirty inhabitants in the dirty street, when Rupert Greppel took the wall of the pretty lady and her escort on the narrow footway and put her out into the dirty gutter of the dirtier street ; but when Sim Crittenden, having dropped behind the girl, following her to let the others pass the more easily, put himself before the great man, and Rupert Greppel cried "Out of the way, fellow !" and Sim Crittenden mocked him, the street began to fill.

It was a deadlock.

Mr. Sim Crittenden took off his hat :

"Sir," said he—"I am in the illegitimate drama, wherein to bray like an ass is the soul of comedy. I am a student of bad manners. Would you mind doing it again ?"

Rupert Greppel struck him with his cane.

Sim Crittenden hit him violently in the mouth, so that Rupert fell ; and as Rupert gathered himself and his dazed wits together, Sim Crittenden took off his straw hat and his coat and handed them sadly to Polly, and, expressing his muttered regret that he was making a beastly scene and was to baptize his betrothal in claret, he squared his huge shoulders for the fray.

Rupert Greppel arose and made an ugly rush at him, and after some fencing, to allow of the crowd's whimsical twitting of the big man, Sim Crittenden gripped his lips tight and struck out, hitting the hidalgic Rupert heavily on the jaw. Rupert answered the helm and sat down—violently.

Sim Crittenden stooped over him :

"Look here, guv'nor," said he, "this ain't no match. It's a

comedy scene for me, but it's a nasty chunk of tragedy for you. You'd better go home."

Rupert Greppel slowly rose, his face was very pale, and, pulling himself together, he went pell-mell, legs and arms, at the past-master of the craft; and Sim Crittenden, seeing he was beyond argument, punished him severely, then held him off with a couple of buffets in the face, and struck him over the heart with a blow that would have cracked a door.

Rupert's heels clattered on the pavement, and he again sat down heavily.

"Take yer seats for Westminister Abbey," said a wag; and there was laughter.

Lord Montagu Askew now complained that Mr. Crittenden's acts were illegal and in bad taste.

Sim Crittenden walked up to the dandified figure of Monty Askew and gave him a sounding slap on the side of the head that knocked his silk hat into the gutter.

Monty went and picked up his hat amidst peals of laughter, and, holding out one expostulant gloved hand, he wiped his bleeding nose on a fine cambric handkerchief.

"You're a most vulgar fellow," he said—"a most vulgar fellow."

The crowd cooed with merriment.

Crittenden went up to him and slapped his face with great strong hands.

Monty Askew sat down on a doorstep and wept bitterly:

"The injustice of it!" he sobbed—"the injustice of it!"

Thus Montagu Askew, blaming the high gods. Thus, as always, dragging the innocent into his quarrels.

As Sim Crittenden walked into the lamplit dusk with Polly, he said, punching the palm of his left with the great fist of the right:

"I'm so happy, Polly, old girl—I have been dying to hit something all this afternoon."

CHAPTER XCI

Wherein the Heir of the Ffolliotts falls the Victim to a Limited Badinage

It was the First-Night of an historic Shakespeare revival; and the theatre of the Lyceum was emptying its fashionable crowd of richly dressed women and men into the garrulous murk of the noisy night. The upturned faces of the gaping crowd, that stood along the great portico in the yellow haze of the street, gazed with serious admiration at the glowing splendour that enveloped the fashionable and the rich—the solemn intentness of their unspoken admiration rippling now and again into a good-natured grin upon some street-wag's sally at the wrinkles of a lean dowager or the comic aspect of an over-plump matron or plain daughter or inane youth or the dozen and one whimsical aspects of things that catch the rambling humour of the people.

Across their gaze swept out of the bawling tumult of the night sundry wreaths of fog, torn from the mists that rose from the river hard by.

On the steps, under the classic portals, stood Ponsonby Wattles Ffolliott, with Quogge Myre and another; and, blowing the cigarette smoke through his nose, where he stood magnificent above the people, Ffolliott was in a stream of languid babble upon the strange fancy that took people to sit through the gloom of a tragedy at considerable personal discomfort and expense "sitting in a dull hole of a place, watching people pretendin' to be dead and that sort of rot," when gayer wits were being fascinated by the movements of women's legs in a good break-down at a musical comedy, or "havin' a good hearty laugh" at the comicalities of the latest comic craze at the music-halls. Thus P. W. Ffolliott—when his eyes were caught by the bold inviting eyes of a handsome young woman that passed.

"Damned pretty woman!" he drawled—"I'm off. Ta-ta, Myre! I suppose you'll want me to meet you at that other dead-house to-morrow, eh? All right. I'll be there. Good-night."

He waved a gay salute, and was gone, disappearing into the bustling throng of the street.

The girl pretended to hurry, but Ffolliott, elbowing his way through the moving crowd, soon overtook her. She was pleased

to be seen with a gentleman of fashion. She was also a little frightened at the insistence of his admiration.

She lifted her skirts above her ankles and picked her way daintily across the Strand, through the riot of passing vehicles and bawling cads, walking serenely amidst the roar of the bewildering traffic.

He kept by her side.

She reached the pavement, and turned towards Charing Cross.

"By jove," said he—"you are a stunning pretty girl."

She laughed airily.

"That ain't my fault," said she.

"But you are."

"Well, you know"—she spoke with a marked cockney accent that strangely sullied the handsome red lips—"my looking-glass tells me that—more than once a day."

"Yes—ha, yes; of course," he drawled, gazing at her admiringly—"of course it does. How stupid of me—how immaculately stupid! But we had better get into a hansom and have some supper somewhere, eh! Rather strenuous idea that—eh!" He haw-hawed.

She laughed, tossed her head—stopped abruptly. And he, looking at her, saw that her face was deathly white. She grasped his arm suddenly:

"Come down here," she said hoarsely—"quick!"

She turned into the foggy blackness of a dingy street that descended to the river, walking hurriedly—and he, expostulant, followed her:

"By George—a very pretty figure," said he. "But look here," he added plaintively, "where are we going? . . . It's getting so damned foggy I shall lose you if you hurry so, don't you know."

She came to a halt under a dingy gas-lamp, and faced him; and he saw that she was very beautiful. The colour had left her face. She was white as marble.

"I saw a man—I was once engaged to him—see?" she said. . . . "He is a dangerous man. Wait here a bit—he'll miss us in the fog. . . . My Gord!" she added hoarsely, "he has followed us!"

The great wreaths of mist swept by them and filled the black hollows of the narrow way with yellow smoke; and into the sombre gleam of the lamp-light, from out the black murk, came the pallid faces of three dark figures—rough-looking fellows that strode down upon them.

One, more genial than the others, cried:

"Chi-hike! that you, Em'ly?"

They halted before the lamp-post.

The girl stood rigid; and faced the three men with contempt.

The wag of the party grinned:

"Engaged, Em'ly?" he asked.

He was set aside by an evil-looking ruffian:

"By God, Em'ly; two years has made a lady of you—don't you make any mistake about it."

She, handsome in her sudden dignity, stood facing the men calmly :

" I ain't chi-hiked by cab-runners," she said ; " and I ain't Emily—except to my friends."

The man laughed roughly. He jerked a thumb at Ffolliott :

" This—one of your friends ?" he asked with a sneering raw mouth.

" Yes," she said—" you leave him alone—or——"

" Yuss ?" he jeered, inquiringly.

" I'll put my bonnet-pin in your face," she said calmly.

" You make your friendship pretty prompt, Em'ly," said he ; and added with a mirthless laugh : " I saw your bleery aristocrat follow you from the bleery the-ayter—I saw the whole bleery scandal. Yer see, I've been sleepin' out under the blue a night or two, and lookin' slippy for a light job, so I have my two eyes about me when I fall up against a the-ayter door at closin' time and the audience is a-gettin' the chuck-out. See ?"

The girl put her hand before her mouth :

" Excuse me yawnin'," she said, " but you make me sleepy."

" Yer ain't goin' to sleep too much to-night," he said, scowling upon her.

" I don't see where I come in," she said, carelessly shrugging her shoulders ; and she stooped and gathered up her skirts in her gloved hand as though to be moving again.

" Well, yer see," said he—" it seems to me as you're what the poet bloke calls the Juliet of a Night—and I'm goin' to be your bloomin' Romeo, see ?" . . . He stepped nearer to her. . . . " Hold up yer bloomin' mouth, and let's kiss yer head."

Ffolliott put out his hand :

" Go away, you vulgar fellow," said he—" you smell."

He was hustled from behind and tripped across the kerb-stone —threw up his hands—lurched forward and fell across the footway. As he fell he rolled over, showing a white face that gleamed death-like under the dim light of the gas-lamp. He lay very still.

The girl whimpered, pulled herself together, and fixed her eyes sternly on the scowling fellow before her, his hands thrust in his coat pockets :

" I saw you do it," she said.

" And after that ?" he asked with a sneer, his chin thrust out at her.

" When twelve men talk about these kind of accidents," she said with biting precision and level voice, " I've heard them call it murder ; and the judge——"

She shrugged her shoulders.

The wag of the party, he whom they called Charlie, interfered :

" Look here, Henery," said he—" you'll be 'ittin' a bloke harder nor what yer wish for, one evenin', and meetin' yer Gawd without a cellar-flap to dance your bloomin' double-shuffle on, see ? The girl's right, see ?"

The scowling fellow stooped down, emptied the money out of the pockets of the fallen man, the gold from one trouser pocket,

the silver from the other, and banknotes from the breast-pocket of the coat. He put back a few shillings in silver, and growled at one of the others to let the watch be and keep his dirty hands from messing the toff's clothes.

"Mates," said he, "rub your hands clean on the seats of yer trouseys, and help me lift the aristocracy on to the road, so's the dint in his head fits the curb, see!"

They lifted him amongst them.

"Steady. Now over 'ere a bit. That's it. The curb just about fits where the bloomin' lead hit his skull. . . . What a lovely accident he looks to be sure! . . . Charlie," he winked at the others, "yer hit him harder than there was need for—he's got a hole in his thinking-box yer could put a good character into. . . . Steady. That's it, leave him alone, can't yer! . . . Now, mates, shall we go and make ourselves conspicuous a-helpin' the aristocracy to find their cabs—or shall we call the police? . . . On the whole, I'm for helpin' the aristocracy. The police might think the lady had led the gent down here—for reasons. Good-night, lady."

He took off his hat with mock solemnity.

Charlie gave a warning whistle:

"I hear a friend of mine coming down the road," he said. "Scatter."

They strode off into the darkness.

The girl stooped down and looked at the fallen man.

"My God!" said she, brushing tears from her eyes—"yes. They might think I had—lured the poor fool—to it!"

She stepped into the fog and followed the sound of the retreating footsteps up the street to the hurly-burly of the town.

CHAPTER XCII

Wherein it is seen that the Blood of the Oldest Families may run to Inconsequence and Mere Vulgar Stains

Lord Wyntwarde, his face purple with anger and his mouth uttering vile oaths that roused ugly echoes in the ruddy old Elizabethan alleys, strode up and down the flagged walk of the ancient cobbled courtyard before his stables; and the family lawyer walked beside him anxiously, with "Tut, tut!" and "Listen to me—*one* moment," and "Be reasonable, Lord Wyntwarde!" whilst the wrathful lord, with much insistence of reiteration, roundly wished him on a far and hot journey, being free from all diffidence in naming the climate.

The coachman's small children stood shrinking from the fury of his lordship's wrath, clinging to each other at the door of their home, peeping coyly over timid little shoulders with large eyes of awe at the cursing tyrant who strode before them. They were dressed for travel—being tied up in large woollen mufflers that seem to be the peculiar badge of the children of cottagers when packed for a journey. Their tearful mother kept bringing down hastily-made parcels and placing them about the door. In the minds of the little ones, behind their wondering eyes, was the picture of their father, the old coachman, sitting in the midst of his dismantled home upstairs, crying like a child.

"Lord Wyntwarde," said the lawyer, "you must pull yourself together and——"

"Oh, go to——"

"Hush—you must pull yourself together and listen to me——"

"Oh, go to the devil——"

"If you will not come indoors, then I must say it here, within earshot of these people."

"I tell you I stand over these hounds until they have packed out of the place—do you hear me!" roared the stout old lord of the place. "Damn it, Overshaw, do you only understand lawyers' swindling English? God in heaven, is my talk too cursedly effeminate for you that I must supply you with a glossary at the end of it? I have sworn it, by the living God, that these people leave my land before the sun sets—or," he added hoarsely, "I go to hell for it. . . . Put that into your damned attorney's gabble if you will—and I'll sign it."

He turned about as he walked and continued his striding. The lawyer turned and walked with him :

"Lord Wyntwarde, I will not remind you of a wise old saying that the sun should not go down upon our wrath."

"Oh, damn your figurative landscapes," said my lord.

"I do not ask you to save yourself from an injustice—I am only asking you to save yourself from an indignity—worse—from utter shame——"

"What have I to do with shame ?"

"What indeed, my lord ?"

The other laughed :

"By God," said he—"you're a wit."

"I ask you to give me ten minutes' close attention——"

"I will not give it."

The old lawyer shrugged his shoulders :

"That is flat. . . . Then I must say it now and here. Your coachman yonder does not even suspect the truth. He has served you loyally through rain and sunshine and cold and heat for twenty and nine years. His loyalty blinds him to all but shame for the master of his house——"

The master of the house laughed roughly :

"Go on, Overshaw, go on—take sides with my grooms—go on. By the splendour of God, a most wondrous coachman !"

"But he will know it within twenty-four hours after leaving this place. God forgive me, he ought to know it now—from my lips. My loyalty to your house brings me near to compounding a felony."

"For God's sake, talk sense, Overshaw ! What is the plain English for all this ?"

"Listen : your son Ponsonby has seduced this man's daughter —which is bad enough. But the girl is only fifteen—the which is a felony."

The old lord burst into a storm of oaths :

"Damn it, Overshaw ; don't I tell you I was for ever drumming it into the lad's ears that there were enough married women of his own class in the county for any sane man's pleasure—and he has descended to my coachman's wenches ! It's the filthy vulgarity of the fellow——"

He stopped—his bloodshot eyes catching the sneer upon the old lawyer's lips :

"What d'ye say ?" he bawled.

The lawyer put his hand on the arm of the other :

"Lord Wyntwarde, you do not understand—the girl is fifteen—this is a common felony—if the young fellow does not marry the girl, he may have to go to gaol—to the common gaol——"

"I am not his keeper—curse him !"

"No," said the old lawyer drily—"but do you want the criminal law to usurp your duties ? . . . There is a child coming. Even if this youth put aside common honour, common justice, as he has done before, it cannot now save him. All depends on how you treat the girl's father."

A groom, on a big bay hunter, came clattering into the courtyard, started at the sight that met him there, leaped off his horse, and walking up to the lawyer, touched his hat and held out a yellow envelope :

" Telegram—for you, sir."

The old gentleman's hands shook as he tore open the cover.

He read it ; and, as he read, his face went deathly pale :

" Good God !" said he.

He glanced at the striding figure of the lord of this splendid place, who paced up and down the courtyard.

" That will do, my man," said he. " There is no answer. . . . Stay ! keep that horse saddled—I may want you—and before long."

The groom saluted and went and stood by the horse.

The lawyer gazed under his brows at the striding lord ; watched him take a couple of turns ; went at last and set himself across his path. The other halted when he came to him.

" Lord Wyntwarde," said the old lawyer hoarsely—" I must go back to town at once. Our arguments are at an end—the reason for them is at an end. . . . Your son is beyond the reach of penalty." The old man took off his hat. " He must plead before a more august judge than his own father."

The other, his face scarlet, stared at him with bloodshot eyes of irritable inquiry. He struck his boot with his whip, savagely, once, twice, thrice :

" Well—what's the cursed melodrama now ?"

" Your son has been found, early this morning. He has fallen —it is thought—he was killed in a street brawl—last night—and has lain where he fell till this morning. It is suspected that there has been foul play." The old lawyer's chin dropped on his chest : " God forgive the poor boy his many sins and weaknesses !"

When the old gentleman roused from his mood and put on his hat, the red anger of his lord had slowly turned to black hate ; and the lawyer waited in a strange wonder—a wonder as to what could be passing through this harsh old brain at such a moment——

The black mood found tongue at last :

" By God," said Lord Wyntwarde hoarsely, and struck the air with his clenched hand, " Caroline and her cub get the estates after all !" He laughed bitterly. " The devil has cheated me—Death plays with loaded dice. . . . No, by God, I have it "—he laughed loud—" I'll baulk them yet—I'll marry this fifteen-year-old she-dog myself. By the splendour of God, my coachman shall give her ladyship away, and yonder groom shall be my best man."

He burst into a loud roar of coarse laughter—suddenly gasped —struggled for air—reeled—put out his hands as though blindness had come upon him—uttered a foul curse, lurched forward, and fell upon his face.

They lifted him up. . . .

Lord Wyntewarde's life had been one long implied boast of

blood. Indeed, he had never realized that he had had too much. The blood of the family had always gone to the head. . . .

The grooms being fore-gathered in the harness-room that night plumbed the deeps of the dead man :

"That was a noisy Bulgarian," said one—"but he had a fine seat on a horse."

The vicar of Cavil had long owed a grudge against the castle for the evil things that therein were done, or said to be done—indeed, it had caused much sly winking and nodding amongst the bucolic wits. But, for his dignity's sake and the sake of the soil that had bred him, his sermon left the dead lord severely alone ; however, he improved the occasion of the young man's death to point out the evils that come of the pursuit of art by a youth who should have been devoting himself to a gentleman's life ; and in particular he laid it down that had this youth not been leaving the immoral precincts of a London theatre on the night on which he met his violent death, he would not have met that death.

Which, of a truth, was as it might have been.

CHAPTER XCIII

Wherein our Hero comes into a Wide Heritage

THE sunny morning was well spent, but Noll was pacing restlessly up and down his little bedroom at the hotel. His breakfast, scarce tasted, lay on a tray at the foot of his bed. His design of finding Betty before he discovered himself to his own people threatened to be baulked ; and defeat fretted his impatient will. So he paced—leopard-like—when there came a tap at his door, and the maid screamed through the panels that a gentleman waited upon him below.

When Noll, descending the stairs, entered the dingy sitting-room of the little hotel, an old gentleman rose to meet him ; and Noll found himself in the presence of the best and most loyal friend his house knew, or was destined to know—the head of the legal firm of Overshaw.

" You must be Oliver Baddlesmere," said the old lawyer—" you are so like your mother ;" and the courtesies passed.

" I am the family lawyer," said he simply. " Your mother told me you were in Paris—but in Paris I was given your address at Mr. Netherby Gomme's here in town. I gathered therefore that you had reasons for your family not knowing your address."

" Yes," said Noll.

" I trust you have no engagements to-day, Mr. Noll."

" I have a serious business, but it must wait a day if you can show me the reason for urgency," said Noll. " For I am baffled, and have found no clue. I am baffled in a search. I have lost my wife," he said simply—" and must find her."

The old eyes grew serious, then twinkled.

" That is the first time I have heard a sentiment of duty from a Ffolliott—from the head of your house," he said. . . . " And I am an old man."

Noll went and looked out of the window :

" Why drag in the Ffolliotts ?" he asked wearily.

" Your mother came into the title and estates three days ago," said the lawyer.

There was a long pause.

At last Noll said hoarsely :

" I must find Betty."

The old lawyer smiled inwardly.

Noll brooded for awhile :

" I shall suffocate in this dingy place," said he. " Let us go out to St. James's Park—we can talk there in the fresh air—and I love the place."

They walked by Charing Cross and Pall Mall to St. James's Park, and thus, and amidst the laughter of children, Noll heard that he had come near to the great responsibilities of his manhood.

The grassy place about him teemed with sweet associations of Betty ; and his mind kept straying away from the recital of his fortune and the duties that had come to him to the rustle of sweet-scented ghostly skirts that swept the grass and the fragrance of a girl's dainty being. And the old lawyer, shrewd man of the world, suspected it, and was glad of it. . . .

The old gentleman arose, and put his last questions :

" Oh, another point, before we part—your cousin wronged a young girl—indeed, he wronged several—and deserted them. What do you wish to be done ?"

He looked keenly at the young fellow before him.

" I, as my mother will do, accept the burdens of my heritage with the honours," said the young fellow—" the debts with the credit." He smiled faintly. " I am afraid I am not a man of fashion."

" You wish the girl provided for ?"

Noll nodded :

" It is only in common honour," he said. " I wish I could wholly blot out the damage. My—wife—would have had it so."

The old gentleman put his hand on the young fellow's shoulder :

" Oliver," said he—" you are bringing more to your house than it is bringing to you. . . . Good-bye !"

CHAPTER XCIV

Wherein it is suspected that the Garden of Eden was Well Lost

Noll, restless, his brain teeming with the things that had befallen him this day, fretted with the baffling dilemma of finding Betty, and alone with his conflicting moods, paced his little room until long after the darkness came into it, when he roused, famished but unhungry, flung out of the hotel, and turned aimlessly northwards, pacing beside the sounding traffic into the darkness of the night, that hung upon the more quiet ways where law students have their dingy habitations.

He wandered towards the old quarters where he had strolled the pavements gaily, a handsome youth, with a handsome girl by his side—every flagstone was familiar to him—every dingiest street-corner held a wan smile beneath its soot.

As he turned into the quaint old street where Betty had lodged, he was startled to see her figure flitting in front of him.

He thought for a moment that he must be suffering from faintness—it came to him that he had not broken his fast since morning. But the sound of her well-known step, the light poise of her lithe figure, left no doubt ; and he cautiously followed her, hanging back, afraid to startle her.

She turned of a sudden, with that forthright aimful intent that directed all her acts ; ran up some steps ; set a key in the lock of the door-latch ; and, the door yawning open, she stepped into the blackness and passed out of the night.

The thud of the slammed door came muffled on the night ; and Noll, striding out, crossed the street and arrived opposite the house where he had spent many a happy tryst. It was the last place in the world whither he would have expected Betty to go into hiding—and he realized, with a whimsical smile, Betty's keen sense of humour and her shrewd capacity, in boldly deciding to hide herself away in her old haunts.

The house was wholly in darkness. Not a soul was astir.

Noll brooded upon it. . . .

At last came a light into a window.

Betty had mounted to her room.

It was the topmost attic of the house—where servants sleep.

Suddenly the singing at his heart ceased, Noll bent brooding wits on the question as to what grinding toil kept Betty's dainty fingers at work at midnight to the winning of bread.

He crossed the road, walked up the steps, and rang the bell ; and, as he did so, a light came into the fan-shaped window over the door where he stood.

There was a drawing of bolts, a key grated in the lock, and the door swung open.

Before him, lit by the candle that she held high above her head, stood a pretty little woman, much overdressed above the extreme height of the fashion with the curious picturesque exaggeration that is the pretty habit of London theatrical folk—yet, for all her charming attire, a daughter of the people. She was in her hat still, as though not long come in.

"Victoria May Alice!" he exclaimed.

She nodded pertly:

"God forgive me, that's me," she said.

She shaded the light from her eyes with one hand, and stared at the youth:

"Well, translate me to uttermost leading parts at the West End Theatres if it ain't Mister Noll! . . . You ain't forgotten Victoria May Alice, anyhow—there's no error in *that* contract."

Noll stepped into the house, shut the door behind him with his heel, and took her hand:

"Victoria May Alice, I could almost kiss you," said he, wringing her fingers. "I'm so glad to know you are staying here—with her."

She laughed:

"Stayin', Mr. Noll? . . . I own the whole bloomin' palace," said she. "When I'm not at the theatre I am running *this* show. I go behind the scenes for sordid tragedy; and I listen to lodgers' complaints for roaring comedy—see? And when you've done that often enough, one week with another, you've eaten a pretty thick slice of life, I can warn you. . . . But, you know, you ain't listenin' to a word I'm sayin'."

He laughed embarrassedly:

"Betty is upstairs," he said.

She nodded:

"H'm, h'm—yes," she said. "You know such a lot you'd almost think you were her husband, Mr. Noll."

He let the thrust pass him.

"Victoria," said he—"why does she work so late?"

"Work?"

"Yes—there's a light in her room."

Victoria May Alice looked at him whimsically:

"Lord," said she, "you men are mostly only fit for comic opera. . . . Well, if you want to know within an acre or two of the truth, call again when the cats are coming home."

"What? Till daylight?" he gasped.

"So help me Henery Irving," she nodded. "You'd see that light burning still when the cockydoos are crowing in the lemon of the morning."

"Good God!" said Noll hoarsely.

"That's right. Put it on to God," she said. "It's so like a man."

She looked at him, and added drily:

"But, of course, Mr. Noll, you don't know. . . . How should you? You're her husband. . . . I think you'd better go up and pull her nut-brown hair about the waste of candles, myself, eh!

What's the good of being married to a woman if you can't order her about ?"

Noll nodded, smiling sadly :

" Yes, I must see her—at once."

" Come along then," said she, leading the way upstairs. She put her fingers on her lips as sign for silence, and after that she spoke never a word until she reached the topmost landing, knocked at the attic door, flung it open ; and, as Noll stepped into the room, shut it again softly, and crept gently down the stairs. . . .

Before the snowy bed stood Betty in her white night-gown and in her arms she held a little child, crooning to it a low-voiced lullaby.

She looked up as the door opened :

" Noll !"

Noll strode over to her, dumb with an overwhelming passion for her, his heart leaping with a great surprise, walked as in a dream, knelt down at her feet, put his arms about her limbs and buried his face in the thin fabric of her nightdress.

" Betty," he said hoarsely—" why did you not tell me this ?"

She laughed sadly :

" I tried to tell you—so many times, Noll—but—you would not listen——"

" Ah me," said he, holding her close (how he loved the musical voice !)—" I have been such a fool—such—a fool ! But I have found you, dear heart, at last—and in finding you I have found all." And he added : " I have suffered, Betty."

She laid her slender fingers upon his head.

He was shaken with a sob.

She stroked his hair :

" I have so longed for you, Noll—it has been very lonely. The little one——"

Noll was sobbing like a child.

She bent down with the babe, lifted Noll's face in her hand and kissed him :

" Hush, Noll, dear heart," she said—" you mustn't do that. This is no time for tears. We have come into our kingdom." She laughed with tears in the laugh. "And it is so near the stars."

" I am glad to be home," he said. And he added with a sad laugh : " It does not make me giddy being near the stars, sweetheart—I have lived up there before—with you."

She stroked his hair :

" Come," she said—" she is fast asleep."

She led him to a small bed. She bent over it to turn down the blankets and sheets and tucked the little one away, her red-brown hair falling about the sleeping child.

He knelt down by the little white cot, a strange singing at his heart, his limbs all a-tremble, and, putting out his hand, touched

the tiny hand of the sleeping child, who opened small warm fingers and clasped his thumb.

His eyes watched the little one hungrily.

Betty sat down sideways on the cot and gazed at them.

"I wonder what you think of her, Noll," she said.

"She is very beautiful," he said.

Betty laughed gently:

"You wouldn't think it, Noll; but she has her faults," she said. "It's no use disguising these things, you are bound to discover them—she is self-willed, tyrannical, unscrupulous—ah, how she tramples one's heart under her woolly little shoes!—she is greedy, frets under opposition, is ridiculously conceited about her mother, I am afraid will be as arrogant about her father as he is about himself, and altogether displays a lack of modesty and of ladylike reserve that causes me the gravest anxiety about her moral attributes. . . . You would never be able to disown her, Noll—she has all your vices."

Noll smiled as the tears trickled down his face:

"I am afraid, Betty," said he—"that a mother's disparagements are but veiled praise."

He held her hand in his.

They sat so for a long while.

As he gazed down upon the little one, it came to him that his mother had so looked down upon him, with a mighty hunger at her heart—that his every pain had been a pain to her—his every smile a smile in her heart. And what had he given in return? He felt now the desolation it must have wrought in the silent mother's heart when he eagerly left the house and sallied forth to his cubhood, unrealizing that his empty place echoed with the sound of a dead child's laughter and the merriment of the days of his innocence.

Would this little one so discard him—and Betty?

Thus, in this cradle was the beginning of that open confidence between him and his mother that lit their love from that time. The grandchild leads the wandering feet home again.

The tears welled into Noll's eyes, and his lip trembled.

Betty stroked his hand:

"Hush, Noll—I have wanted you. That is enough, isn't it?"

He bowed his head.

"Noll," said Betty—"thou wilt be kind to her. . . . If she lose me she has only you." And she added after awhile: "The child whose spirit is broken cannot be of the Masterfolk."

Noll lifted her fingers to his lips.

Betty bent forward and kissed him; she laughed happily:

"Noll," said she—"Eve did well when she flung away Paradise to know the love of a little child."

THE END

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